

# Reflection on Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Kavango in Namibia

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This thesis examines perspectives that Christians in Western Kavango in Namibia have about Christianity and their past religious traditions. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (former Finnish Missionary Society) has been working there since 1926. The latest Finnish missionaries left the area in 2013. The Catholic mission was already active in Kavango when the Finns arrived, but Catholicism has been more influential in the eastern part of Kavango. Nowadays new, Pentecostal type churches are attracting a lot of people.</p> <p>The basic research method has been interviewing people in Kavango. First, I wanted to know why they are Christians and what Christianity means to them. Second, I interviewed them about what they know or remember about old cultural traditions and how they evaluate them. I also wished to get deeper into the process of conversion, but I was not able to do so, mainly because almost all the informants had been Christians since their childhood.</p> <p>It seems that people in Kavango have taken Christianity as their own. Christianity in Kavango also has longer and deeper roots than I expected. All the informants said that they are Christians and all consider Christianity as important for themselves. There was more variation in how they expressed the basic meaning of Christianity: salvation to heaven after death, getting daily bread from God, or having order and purpose in life. Prayer is very important to Christians in Kavango; almost every informant spoke something about prayer although I did not ask about it. This may have something to do with the tradition of offering and praying to ancestral spirits. Now Christians feel they have direct contact to God through prayer, as there is no more need to approach him through a mediator.</p> <p>Early missionaries required a Christian way of life from converts. Women had to cut away their traditional hairdo, and polygamous men had to send extra wives away. Concerning the hairdo the missionaries thought that it involves a lot of magic, whereas the local people saw it only as a matter of beauty until they adopted new ideals of hygiene. Polygamy has been more common than I expected and is still found in Kavango. The church still follows the guideline on polygamy given by the missionaries. The moral code of the church is strict in particular on cohabitation before marriage. Strict morals are not, however, only a product of the mission; the traditional society used to have harsh punishments.</p> <p>Traditional healing divides opinions. On one hand Christians also admit there are true herbal remedies that healers know. On the other hand many healers are only cheating people to get money, and even today some point out "witches" as the cause of illness or injury, leading to blaming of innocent people.</p> <p>In general, it can be said that Christians in Kavango consider Christianity and traditional African religion as a continuum, not as opposites. They compare their pre-Christian era with the Old Testament. When they prayed God through their forefathers, it was like praying the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In fact, the world of the Old Testament is close to that of African traditional life in many aspects. Even so, Christians in Kavango see Christianity as something brought to them by God's power, so they can confess faith in Jesus whom they did not previously know.</p>		
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. *The Objectives of the Study*

The aim of this research is to describe Christianity and its interpretations, history and relation to local culture in Western Kavango in Namibia. Embracing Christianity in this area is clearly connected to cultural change. I intend to find out how the people there understand themselves as Christians with respect to their historical past and traditions and how they now evaluate their pre-Christian cultural and religious traditions. I also try to couple religious issues and changes to the general history of the area.

With Western Kavango I mean what is approximately the Kavango West Region in the present-day Namibia. Kavango used to be one administrative region in Namibia, but it was split into two regions, Kavango West and Kavango East, in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Western Kavango is roughly equal with the Kwangali speaking area and corresponds to the part of Kavango where Finnish missionaries have been working. The name Kavango derives from the Kavango River, which starts in central Angola and ends in the inland Okavango Delta in Botswana.<sup>2</sup> The river has several names; in Angola it is called Cubango and in Botswana Okavango; the Kwangali people simply call it *mukuro*, meaning a river or a stream. The form Okavango was used earlier in the mission literature, because it was the way of Owambo languages known to the first Finnish missionaries to come to the area.

In my bachelor's thesis<sup>3</sup> I explored the first decade of Finnish missionary work in Kavango. Then I read copies of the mission magazine *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* from the era and explored how missionaries described their work and the traditional culture in Kavango.

In my master's thesis I want to get deeper into this theme and make the African voice audible. What has been written about the topic is mainly by Finnish missionaries, and I do recognise my limits as one of them. Yet my honest wish is to study ideas of the Namibians themselves. How do they experience the new faith replacing their old beliefs and customs, or has it really replaced the old? The old missionaries saw "paganism" as a complete opposite to Christianity. However, I am inclined to think that the Africans did not experience the new belief as something totally new, but on the contrary as a kind of broadening out their

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<sup>1</sup> Kavango West 2016. There are now altogether fourteen administrative regions in Namibia.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2004, 38, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Muurman 2011.

existing horizons, as something that they already had, but into which missionaries added more information. In this work I try to get some proof for this hypothesis.

Some scholars have criticised missionaries and blame them for endeavouring to transform black people into whites. Becoming Christian also brought about major changes to the African way of life. The postcolonial critics point out that missionaries brought their cultural habits together with the new faith and thus underestimated the traditional values and skills of the black population. I anticipate that Namibians do not take this as such a contradictory issue as European intellectuals.

I have personal interest in Kavango after having lived and worked in the area. I also think that the history of Christianity in Kavango is worth studying, because there is very little existing research on it. Owamboland<sup>4</sup> has attracted relatively wide research from different perspectives, but the more remote and less populous Kavango has been neglected. However, at least 120 Finnish missionaries have worked in the western part of Kavango, so it is not an insignificant part of Finnish mission history.<sup>5</sup>

In this study, however, I will turn the view over from the Finns to the Namibians, what they think about their religion both now and in the past and how they see the work done by missionaries. Simultaneously I wish to do my part to get the people in Kavango recognised and heard. In fact, they have already started exploring and safekeeping their cultural heritage, too. Presently there seems to be enthusiasm for museums in the region.<sup>6</sup> However, the only up-to-date text that I have found about Lutheran church history in Kavango is a booklet written by

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<sup>4</sup> Owamboland is an area in northern Namibia and southern Angola to the west from Kavango including about ten former kingdoms or (kingless) territories sharing similar type of culture and dialects. Nowadays the Namibian Owamboland consists of four administrative regions. Different spellings of Owamboland and Owambo people can be seen in various sources. I checked the spelling from an Owambo friend of mine and she recommended this one I am using. According to her, the form Ovambo (with single v) that seems to be prevalent in Finnish dissertations comes from Afrikaans language. The entity of Owamboland is arguable as a colonial construction, but it is so widely used in Finnish mission literature and even in everyday dialect in Namibia, so I use it in this thesis. The distance from Oshakati in Owamboland to Nkurenkuru in Kavango is about 300 km as the crow flies.

<sup>5</sup> A list of the Finnish missionaries having worked in Kavango is printed in Ausiku 2011, 93–95. Alongside the Finns themselves, an unknown number of Christians from Owamboland who had been trained by Finns also worked as missionaries and teachers in Kavango.

<sup>6</sup> *Otate* Heikki Ausiku, one of my informants, is also a member of committee eagerly planning to make the old church of Nkurenkuru into a museum. The Living Museum of the Mbunza is another local example about how history can be made interesting and alive. Living Museum Mbunza. Kavango Museum was officially opened last year in Rundu and provides perspective especially on the liberation struggle in Kavango. New Era about Kavango Museum 2016. Also a Roman Catholic Mission Museum exists in Shambyu. Lonely Planet about Shambyu Catholic Museum.

*otate*<sup>7</sup> Heikki Ausiku in the Kwangali language.<sup>8</sup> It was written especially to remind the local people about God's saving work and the dedication shown by Finnish missionaries in Kavango.<sup>9</sup> It is not, then, a scholarly work, but basic facts are collected there.

A major obstacle in the study of Kavango history is that local people were not yet literate when Christianity came to the area. There are practically no written sources from the beginning of the Christian era from an indigenous perspective. In order to find some information, I decided to interview people from Kavango to get their views.

I would like to find out why the people in Kavango (especially the Kwangali speaking people in Western Kavango) are Christians. However, this may be too difficult to answer in general. Rather, I can get my informants' personal stories to illustrate what Christianity means to them. In the interviews I will also ask what they know or remember about old cultural traditions in Kavango and how they now evaluate these. I would like to outline how the local people accepted Christianity. With the interviews made from the present perspective, it will not be possible to get a deep insight into the actual process of conversion. However, using the existing literature I will also sketch an overall picture of the history of Christianity in Western Kavango. This ethnohistorical work looks back at the past century.

I have chosen to write my master's thesis in English in order to continue discussion with the Namibians, whose ideas I seek to survey. The real check, if I understood them correctly, should come directly from them. That could lead to going deeper into these questions, correcting wrong conclusions and finally yielding into a truer picture of how and why the people in Western Kavango have adopted Christianity.

## **1.2. Earlier Research**

Only a little literary material about Kavango exists; only few academic studies have been written concerning the culture in Kavango. The historical sources, especially for church history in Western Kavango, could be found mainly in the

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<sup>7</sup> *Otate* is a form of address for a man, literally meaning father, but more often used like Mr or Uncle. In this study I am using this word as a respectful title for male informants older than myself. The corresponding term for a woman is *onane*.

<sup>8</sup> Ausiku 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Foreword by Rev Ernestus Karuyeva in Ausiku 2011, 6.

archives of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), until 1985 Finnish Missionary Society (FMS)<sup>10</sup>. Of course a proper history study would unravel the archives of the Finnish mission, but to do that for a 90-year period from the beginning of the Finnish mission in Kavango until now would amount to a doctoral thesis, and the emphasis of this study is on finding the Namibian perspective instead of the Finnish one. The Catholic mission has been working in Kavango, too, and there is more literature from or about them, but I will focus my work on the influence of the Finnish mission..

The history of the Finnish mission in Kavango has been written only in the 1950s, when a comprehensive study of Finnish missionary work in Africa was made by Dr Matti Peltola for the 100th anniversary of the Finnish Missionary Society.<sup>11</sup> At approximately the same time, FMS also published a book for its supporters, describing work that was done in Kavango.<sup>12</sup> However, these books are so old that they could almost better function as objects for historical study than as research literature as such. As far as I know, since then there have been no all-encompassing studies about Evangelical Lutheran mission or church work in Kavango except the already mentioned smaller booklet composed by Rev Heikki Ausiku (2011) in the Kwangali language.<sup>13</sup> Some aspects of missionary work in Kavango have been described in dissertations of church history by Kati Kemppainen (1998) and Pauli Laukkanen (2002). Kemppainen studied the relationships of the Finnish mission to the Anglicans and Catholics between the World Wars,<sup>14</sup> and Laukkanen studied translating the Bible into languages of northern Namibia including Kwangali spoken in Western Kavango.<sup>15</sup>

As for culture in Kavango, there is an anthropological work called *The Kavango Peoples* by Gibson, Larson and McGurk (1981).<sup>16</sup> In principle it gives comprehensive descriptions about the five main Kavango tribes in terms of political structure, everyday life and religious rituals, among others. However, as scientific as this work tends to be, I do not fully trust it. It seems that the authors have not been on the spot themselves, but simply collected all the different pieces

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<sup>10</sup> About the change of the name in Mission Agencies. Nowadays the archives of the mission are included in the Finnish National Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Peltola 1958.

<sup>12</sup> Okavango 1958.

<sup>13</sup> Ausiku 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Kemppainen 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Laukkanen 2002.

<sup>16</sup> The Kavango Peoples 1981.



of written documents they could find from various sources.<sup>17</sup> I consider more reliable a work about Kwangali traditions by Romanus Kampungu (1965), because he is a Kwangali himself.<sup>18</sup> He became a doctor in Canon Law, but the volume that I have in my hands is not his actual dissertation on marriage customs (which would have been interesting), but instead an introductory work dealing with kingship lineage traditions of the Kwangali people. Interestingly, Kampungu stated about the Kavango peoples in 1960s that “their acculturation has been rather slow and their customs kept, to greater extent, inviolate and intact.”<sup>19</sup> He was still able, then, to tell about traditional life and beliefs as he himself had experienced them.

After a long search I found literature specialising in Kavango history. Most of this has been written in German. The interest of Germans in the area can be traced to German colonial history in South West Africa and also to the country of origin of several Catholic missionaries. Andreas E. Eckl has written his thorough dissertation *Herrschaft, Macht und Einfluß* (Lordship, Power and Influence) about German colonial history in Kavango from 1891 to 1921. The work deals with competition between German and Portuguese colonialism and also discusses western influence via migrant labour and mission.<sup>20</sup>

Maria Fisch has studied the beginning of South African rule in Kavango in her work *Die südafrikanische Militärverwaltung (1915–1920) und die frühe Mandatszeit (1920–1936) in der Kavango-Region / Namibia*.<sup>21</sup> Fisch was originally a missionary medical doctor in the eastern (predominantly Catholic) part of Kavango. Although she was not educated as a historian or anthropologist, she has been called “the top authority in all historical matters relating to the Kavango and Caprivi peoples.”<sup>22</sup> I also found several ethnographic articles written by her; an example is a study about the ritual of the first hair-cut.<sup>23</sup> She has also written a 75-year-history of the Catholic mission among the Shambyu tribe.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This can be concluded from sentences such as the following: “Eedes (1933:60) says mats are used for hut roofs, but all other sources refer to huts as being thatched.” McGurk & Gibson 1981, 48. It is fairly easy to see the thatched huts while travelling in Kavango!

<sup>18</sup> Kampungu 1965. Dr Romanus Kampungu (1918–1975) is the first person from Kavango who has defended his doctoral thesis. In his last years he was involved in politics instead of a priestly ministry. Fisch 2009, 118–119.

<sup>19</sup> Kampungu 1965, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Eckl 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Fisch 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Fleisch & Möhlig 2002, 8–9. See also Namibian about Maria Fisch 2009 and Namibiana about Maria Fisch 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Fisch 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Fisch 2009.

There is also a Finnish master's thesis in sociology about population figures based on church registers 1950–1996 in Kavango.<sup>25</sup> In addition to these, more personal and memoir-type materials related to the Finnish mission are available. The most interesting are Håkan Hellberg's memoirs, published in 2007, about his time in Nkurenkuru as a young medical doctor in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>26</sup> Actually, then, there is material, but it is very patchy and must be collected here and there, and much of it is actually related to the eastern peoples that are outside my scope.

The general history of Namibia is fairly well written. Marion Wallace's *A History of Namibia* is the best that I have found and reaches from prehistory to 1990, when the Namibia became an independent republic.<sup>27</sup> However, the closer to present day the history comes, the more there are open questions to study. Also a *History of the Church in Namibia* has been compiled by Gerhard L Buys (Reformed) and Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala (Lutheran, nowadays a bishop of ELCIN) together. Unfortunately, the book does not have much to say about Kavango.<sup>28</sup>

FELM has a long history in the neighbouring area traditionally called Owamboland. The cultural history of the Owambo peoples has been recorded in several studies that I can use for comparison in my work concerning Kavango history. Olli Miettinen's dissertation *On the Way to Whiteness* appeared the most important to me.<sup>29</sup> The work deals with Christianisation and cultural change in Owamboland from 1910 to 1965. It studies exactly the same questions in Owamboland as I try to study in Kavango context and thus gives a good reference for comparing the development. The work includes fundamental analysis of the effects of the Finnish mission. Much more critics against mission comes from Lovisa T. Nampala's and Vilho Shigwedha's *Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change*. They describe Owambo traditions concerning traditional rituals and costumes.<sup>30</sup> Minna Saarelma-Maunumaa has produced an interesting dissertation about anthroponymic systems (personal names) in Namibia.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lemström 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Hellberg 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Wallace 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Miettinen 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Nampala & Shigwedha 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003.

### **1.3. Research Process and Methods**

#### **1.3.1. Planning the Work**

The principal sources for my thesis are the focused interviews made in Namibia in July 2013. Before travelling to Namibia I was in e-mail correspondence with Dr Pekka Lund, the first supervisor of my study. Together we decided on focused interviews concerning the ideas of the informants about Christianity, western and local culture, and traditional African beliefs. A focused interview uses free format and order to deal with the themes of the study.<sup>32</sup> To avoid problems of remembrance the perspective was to be kept mainly in today's situation instead of the past. The interviews were to deal with the following topics:

1. What is the informant's personal history in regard to Christianity?
2. What does Christianity mean for him/her now?
3. How does he/she understand the relationship between Christianity and culture?
4. Does Christianity represent something foreign and western for him/her?
5. What does he/she know about the past local religious traditions, and how does he/she relate to them?<sup>33</sup>

Starting with an easy question about personal history allows the interviewee to "talk him/herself in in the interview."<sup>34</sup> The personal stories also give material for the question why the people in Kavango are Christians. The second theme aims to survey how they experience their Christian faith. In practice the second theme almost completely overlapped the first one.

The third theme was difficult. The instructions I got were to operationalise it with questions concerning morals, society, choice of professions, family relationships, arts and the like. In order to explore the meaning of a religion we should first know its limits for the people under the study.<sup>35</sup> But as I tried to find out the difference between religion and culture without explaining too much myself, the question probably remained too abstract to grasp.

The fourth theme turned out almost equally difficult to handle. I tried to ask whether the Namibians experienced Christianity as a western religion, because it was brought to them by the Europeans. We also talked about if Christianity

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<sup>32</sup> Tiittula & Ruusuvaori 2005, 11; Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 197; Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Pekka Lund's e-mail 27.5.2013.

<sup>34</sup> Pekka Lund's e-mail 27.5.2013. Lund expressed in Finnish "*puhua itsensä sisään haastatteluun.*"

<sup>35</sup> Pekka Lund's e-mail 27.5.2013.

represented an outstanding education or competent nursing or something alike to them. The question whether Christianity was European or African was, however, best discussed in connection to the last theme, which was about old Kavango traditions. This included concrete evaluation about traditional clothing, marriage norms, traditional healers, rain-making rituals, and some other aspects. I explored what the people remembered and knew about the traditional ways of life.

As difficult as the questions eventually proved to be in making the interviews, they nevertheless provided me with a framework for making the analysis.

### **1.3.2. Oral Sources**

An ordinary history thesis is based on written documents from the era being studied. In Kavango the possible documents are scarce, however, because at the advent of Christianity the majority of the people were illiterate. Even nowadays literary culture is very limited. A friend of mine from Kavango once commented that outside school people do not really read anything. Why, then, to write? As written documents hardly exist, I had to find out the facts orally. My first idea was to interview old people who would still remember the time before Christianity, and could tell how and why their life changed, when accepting the new faith.

However, the study of history uses contemporary documents, because memory cannot be trusted. Arthur P. Bochner writes about memory:

Like it or not, if we're honest we have to admit that our memories shade, reconcile, and piece together; they delete, select, and edit. Memory is not an archive or a repository.<sup>36</sup>

Alessandro Portelli formulates the basics of oral sources:

Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.<sup>37</sup>

A person narrating his/her experiences later on readily expresses the happenings in the way they should have happened. This tells more about the meaning of the events than how they actually happened. The credibility of oral sources is thus different from that of written documents. They are psychologically true.<sup>38</sup>

In modern historical research we can understand that there is no one single truth. Different people experience things in different ways and cultures may be polyphonic. Oral narratives are always interpretation of the past – but in fact, all

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<sup>36</sup> Bochner 2007, 205.

<sup>37</sup> Portelli 1990, 50.

<sup>38</sup> Portelli 1990, 51–52.

history is that.<sup>39</sup> Oral history is indeed necessary, if one wants to survey everyday life, marginal groups or such ethnic groups that have not produced written documents.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of oral narratives in historical study is defended by Raphael Samuel. According to him, oral sources can be used to supplement or even to rectify written documents:

Documents cannot answer back, nor, beyond a point, can they be asked to explain in greater detail what they mean, to give more examples, to account for negative instances, or to explain apparent discrepancies in the record which survives.<sup>41</sup>

An interview may thus provide crucial background understanding and even bring documents to life.<sup>42</sup> Reminiscences are products of the interaction between the events and our brains. They are selected and moulded. But they are essential to the identity of a person and even to that of a people. They must be listened to with a critical ear, but yet we also remember a lot correctly. “For if our observations and their interpretation were so uncertain, we could not function at all,” notes Jan Vansina, an expert on African oral tradition.<sup>43</sup>

It can also be noted that the literary documents, too, are seldom written by eye-witnesses on the spot, and even if they were, there might still be misinterpretations.<sup>44</sup> Samuel even argues that the survival of written documents is the most hazardous and contingent factor in the study of history.<sup>45</sup>

### **1.3.3. Interviewing**

The informants interviewed in this study represent various social and age groups: youth and senior citizens, men and women, more or less educated, some influential in their church and society and others rank and file. There were no group interviews except that in some cases I needed an interpreter to be present as a third party.

The interviews were supposed to be focused interviews to cover the themes under study. To be honest, the interviews remained rather unstructured. The whole discussion was more or less free, and I did not have any set of questions on paper. What had been discussed with one informant often gave ideas for the next interview with someone else. In most cases, I did not cover all the topics or

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<sup>39</sup> Fingerroos & Peltonen 2006, 9–10, 16–17.

<sup>40</sup> Fingerroos & Haanpää 2006, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel 1982, 141.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel 1982, 141.

<sup>43</sup> Vansina 1985, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Portelli 1990, 51–52.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel 1982, 144.

touched some of them only slightly, because the informant's time was limited. Anyway, I got a lot of material, in my understanding more than enough for a master's thesis. The accuracy of the material leaves much to be desired. Such ambiguity is the nature of colloquial speech.

Guidebooks on interviewing emphasize that an interview is always interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. The sentences spoken have their meaning only as parts of a dialogue, and all participants of an interview produce knowledge. When someone reminisces and tells about happenings in the past, new meanings may be attached to them. Here is also the problem of the credibility of oral narratives: stories are biased by new perspectives arising from the time and situations.<sup>46</sup>

The language skills and talkativeness of each respondent were important factors in deciding about the interviewing technique. Sometimes I had to make many short questions, sometimes I just gave the topic and the respondent produced a voluble speech.

All the interviews were carried out in English. None of the participants spoke it as a native language, and none of us could speak it with such an expressive power as one's mother tongue. However, English is the official language of Namibia, so most people there are used to speaking it. In cases, where the respondent knew hardly any English, I used an interpreter for assistance.

The interpreter was a different person in each case, and none of them was professional in the task. Two of the interpreters were also my informants, and the third one was a grandchild to the informant interviewed. They were all local people, familiar with the culture of the person they interpreted. Each one of them also comprehended my research sufficiently.

However, interpreting was not without problems. It always slowed down the work. I believe that each interpreter translated as well as he or she could. But he/she always told me the basic meaning of the response; the translation was never literal. First I wished to transcribe the local language, too, but I had to realise that my Kwangali skills are not enough. In addition, Shambyu and Luchazi languages were used.

In traditional methodology, interpreters have been considered some kind of threat. The message always changes when it is transmitted by an agent.

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<sup>46</sup> Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005, 202; Ruusuvuori & Tiittula 2005, 29; Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2005, 12; Salmi-Nikander 2006, 207.

Nowadays, however, an interpreter is considered as one of the several persons producing information.<sup>47</sup> Especially in the interview of the elderly headman *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu the interpreter acted constructively. Sometimes he requested more information or explained more to detail. He interpreted between the cultures as well: I had to abide with the fact that a male interpreter could not discuss women's private issues although I would have been curious about them.<sup>48</sup>

#### **1.3.4. The Informants**

For this study I interviewed various Christian persons from Kavango. The informants range from a confirmation candidate to a bishop emeritus. The choice of the informants was more or less arbitrary. Before I travelled, I had only one specific person in mind, namely Rev Heikki Ausiku, the author of the booklet on local church history. I did not yet know him personally; he was working elsewhere at the time I lived in Namibia. Rev Ausiku has prestige among his people, is an educated man also by western standards, and it is easy to communicate with him.

I have a total of thirteen (13) interviews in my material, eleven of them from July 2013 and two others. Only four of the informants are females. That was not intentional, but depended on whom I happened to meet. Except for the youngest generations, men are more fluent in English, and therefore easier to interview.

My original idea for this study was to interview particularly elderly persons about their memories from the time before Christianity. As there are problems in what can be remembered and how precisely, I had to change the perspective to what the people in Kavango think now. That indeed yielded to better results, because also younger people were interviewed and the interviews directly in English were more to the depth than those ones done with an interpreter. I have anyway five interviews with persons in a retired age. All of them were, however, baptised as babies or children.

All of the informants are Christians from Kavango. The majority of them are Lutherans from the ELCIN church (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia). The others have at least some kind of Lutheran background; they have been baptised by the Finnish missionaries or they have gone to the school of the Lutheran church. It is the influence of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) on which I focus this study. However, both other major groups in

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<sup>47</sup> Berman & Tyyskä 2011, 179–181.

<sup>48</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 27.7.2013 & 28.7.2013, interpreted by Stanilaus Semethe.

Kavango, namely the Catholic Church and the new African Pentecostal type churches, are included. None of the informants views the world from outside of Christianity. Also, everyone I know from Namibia believes in God.

Although the study looks at Kavango, the informants come from different ethnic groups. The major local language in western Kavango is Kwangali, but everyone does not belong to the Kwangali tribe. At least four of my informants have an Angolan background, which is quite typical in Kavango. In the past the River Kavango was not a border but a passageway. The interviews were made in different locations: five on actual Kwangali area (*Ukwangali*) in Nkurenkuru and another five in Rundu, which is on the border between the western and eastern parts of Kavango. Rundu became a central town of the whole Kavango region after the government post was moved there in 1936.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the interviews made in Namibia, I added two other cases into my material. Nikolaus Katombera visited my home in Helsinki, while he was an exchange student in Finland. He has an exceptional life as an albino. Another additional case is Mr C. He is an active member of an African Pentecostal type church. I made my first trial to collect material by e-mails in 2008 and sent questions to many of my former students. Mr C was the only one who answered.<sup>50</sup> Hence I understood that I must do the interviews on the spot. Africans are easy to talk with, but I can hardly get anything if I expect my friends to write.

According to Tremblay, a few key informants are enough to give qualitative and descriptive information concerning a certain culture. He sets the following criteria for the selection of informants: their role in community, knowledge, willingness, communicability, and impartiality. He even notes that the selection does not have to be representative of age, sex and locality of residence.<sup>51</sup> The criteria mentioned above were filled although the choice of my informants was somewhat arbitrary.

All the informants are presented in a table in the appendix. (The ages are only estimates.)

In addition to the interviews I visited the Mbunza Living Museum.<sup>52</sup> Its concept is to exhibit traditional ways of life in practice. The staff wears traditional clothing (except that women conceal their breasts and have no *rukura* on their

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<sup>49</sup> Fleisch & Möhlig 2002, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Mr C's e-mails 1.10.2008, 19.2.2009 and 28.5.2010.

<sup>51</sup> Tremblay 1982, 98–102.

<sup>52</sup> Living Museum Mbunza. The full name of this museum is Living Museum of the Mbunza, but I call it shortly as Mbunza Living Museum. (The source indicated here is their internet page.)



skin) and shows how different household tasks such as cooking, fishing, tannery, basket weaving, and iron manufacture are done, and they display traditional dancing and medicinal herbs. I recorded the speech of the museum guide and took a lot of photos. Thus the visit to the museum provided a lot of material for this study.

### 1.3.5. Ethical Considerations

I knew most of the informants beforehand, having met them before. It can be argued that this can bias the research, but I feel that being familiar with them helped a lot in interviewing.

First of all, I was able to estimate, who might be capable and willing to participate and have something to say about the themes. Second, I feel that in most cases familiarity made the discussions more free, relaxed and open. I assume that the informants were much more honest and told their experiences more confidentially and deeply in the interviews than they would have done with an unknown researcher. However, Tiittula and Ruusuvuori give a word of warning: “Closeness between the interviewer and interviewee creates confidence, but can also make the interviewee to get overtly candid and reveal things that he or she later on regrets.”<sup>53</sup>

In reference to so-called expert interviews<sup>54</sup> the names of the informants are given. In some cases, where I consider part of a discussion sensitive, I have kept the informant under a pseudonym to protect him/her even if I would have got the permission.

The only one who openly deliberated whether to give information to me, was Rev Heikki Ausiku. He did not know me in advance, and he is one of the traditional authorities who can decide to whom and what they can tell of the matters of the Kwangali people. He spoke about protecting their “intellectual property.”<sup>55</sup> Research can be exploiting; even the most benevolent research also serves the interests of the researcher. It has to be asked whether research brings people forward and gives them a true voice, or does it put words in their mouth.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2005, 17. ”Haastattelijan ja haastateltavan läheisyys synnyttää luottamusta mutta voi saada haastateltavan avautumaan ja kertomaan asioita, joiden paljastamista hän myöhemmin katu.”

<sup>54</sup> About expert interviews, Expert Interview 2013; Alastalo & Åkerman 2010, 372–391.

<sup>55</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>56</sup> Aaltonen 2005, 187 referring to Seidman 1998.

Cultural differences may be a means of producing otherness.<sup>57</sup> One can, for example, too easily assume that the people coming from the same ethnic group share similar ideas.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, when talking with my African friends, I may also forget that they come from another cultural background than me.

Many aspects like sex, age, socioeconomic status or power relations may cause exaggerating or underestimating of what people say.<sup>59</sup> I have been a teacher to some of my informants, and many thought of me primarily as a missionary, so most probably the respondents associated a higher status to me. In my own opinion, I am barely an adult in comparison to the venerable elderly informants.

I must pay special attention to the objectivity of this study, because I am a former missionary. When it comes to understanding an African person, I am an outsider. I can never fully grasp another culture. I think, however, that because I have lived in Kavango for some years, I have better opportunities for understanding the people there than most other westerners. I have seen the surroundings and can imagine how the people there live, and I have at least some basic understanding of a local indigenous language.

Berg and Lune, referring to many others, stated that research can never be fully value-neutral. Instead, revealing the researcher's own starting points makes the whole process more transparent. Berg and Lune also encourage an ethnographic researcher to make friends with the people under study.<sup>60</sup>

Ethics of research also include that research must be as trustworthy as possible. Classically this is estimated by the concepts of validity and reliability.<sup>61</sup> A research is valid, if the researcher's interpretation corresponds with the informants' ideas.<sup>62</sup> A study is reliable, if another researcher using another method could get similar results.<sup>63</sup> Nowadays, however, many researchers share the opinion that there is no one single correct result: even the same material can be interpreted in several different ways. Coherence, meaning no inner contradictions, thus becomes the criterion for a good research..<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Pietilä 2010, 420; Rastas 2005, 84.

<sup>58</sup> Rastas 2005, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Alasuutari 2005, 152–153; Rastas 2005, 94–95.

<sup>60</sup> Berg & Lune 2012, 208, 212, 217.

<sup>61</sup> Miettinen 2005, 25 concretised validity as "how much did the missionaries actually know about what was happening in Ovamboland" and reliability as "how truthfully did they report it" in his study about cultural change in Ovamboland due to (Finnish) missionary work.

<sup>62</sup> Keats 2000, 77.

<sup>63</sup> Keats 2000, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 151–159.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1. Introduction

Namibia was one of the last colonies in the world, attaining independence in 1990. Surrounded by deserts, Namib and Kalahari, Namibia has limited resources of water, and the population in the vast area is small (only about 2.4 million people on an area 2½ times that of Finland). The best environment for agriculture can be found in the north, and that is where the largest numbers of people are living.<sup>65</sup>

The River Kavango flows from the more watered highlands in central Angola and spreads into the swampy Okavango Delta in Botswana to finally disappear in the bowels of Kalahari sands. About 500 km stretch of the river belongs to Namibia, much of this stretch making borderline towards Angola. Most of the population in Kavango lives on a narrow zone near to the river due to the vital importance of water. The vegetation type can be classified as tree savanna. When the population was still small, wild animals used to be abundant in the area.<sup>66</sup>

The history of the Kwangali (the main ethnic group in this study) can be counted to start only sometime between 1750 and 1800 along the River Kavango.<sup>67</sup> Before 1910 the southern side of the Kavango River, which belongs to present-day Namibia, was practically no-man's-land inhabited only by tiny groups of San (Bushmen).<sup>68</sup> Little by little people moved on to cultivate new land as the population grew, or as they escaped persecutors. At the same time they pushed the indigenous population, the San, into more hostile areas.

Kavango has an area of about 49,000 km<sup>2</sup> and, nowadays, a population of about 238,000.<sup>69</sup> The population is rapidly growing. In 1991, soon after Namibia got its independence, the population in Kavango was about 136,000, whereas the estimate for the 1920s was only 20,000.<sup>70</sup> Much of the rapid growth is explained by continuous immigration across the river from the Angolan side.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, xxi–xxii; Wallace 2011, 1–2; CIA World Factbook Namibia 2017.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Malan 1995, 36; Fisch 2004, 192; Hellberg 2007, 16–17.

<sup>67</sup> Gibson et al 1981, 30, 37; Malan 1995, 36; Maho 1998, 37–39.

<sup>68</sup> Gibson 1981, 23, 30; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 37; Malan 1995, 35; Fleisch & Möhlig 2002, 26; Fisch 2009, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Namibia Population Statistics 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Gibson 1981, 16–17; Malan 1995, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Gibson 1981, 16.

Originally the river was not considered a border, but a fairway for motion and transport. Even nowadays same languages are spoken on both sides of the river.<sup>72</sup> Traditionally Kavango River valley adjacent to present-day Namibia has been divided into five kingdoms called Kwangali, Mbunza, Shambyu, Gciriku and Mbukushu (from west to east).<sup>73</sup> In addition, there are several minority groups originally from Angola living in the Kavango area in Namibia.<sup>74</sup>

Kwangali language is spoken among the Kwangali and the Mbunza. The Finnish missionaries have been working in their area, and the Lutheran church (ELCIN)<sup>75</sup> is stronger there. The eastern part of Kavango is largely Catholic. Finnish missionary work had started in Owamboland in 1870, and was expanded to Kavango about sixty years later. The area was so far and difficult to access from Owamboland that it was practically considered a mission field of its own.<sup>76</sup>

## **2.2. Traditional Life in Kavango**

Each of the Kavango peoples has a king (*hompa*) of their own.<sup>77</sup> In an academic text “chief” might be a more correct term instead of king. Many sources, however, refer to “kings,” and before the advent of colonial administration such a king was an almost absolute monarch in his area of control.<sup>78</sup> A king was free to take any woman as his consort, could take as many wives as he wished, and even kill his subjects at will.<sup>79</sup> There was no private ownership of land; instead, the *hompa* has been responsible for distributing communal land to be used by his subjects, and has also been in charge of judicial proceedings.<sup>80</sup> He had some elders (*marenga*), clan leaders (*masimbi*) and, later in the colonial time, headmen<sup>81</sup> (*foromani*) to assist him in making decisions.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Mendelsohn & Obeid 2004, 133; Language Maps 2016.

<sup>73</sup> For example Malan 1995, 35; Maho 1998, 37.

<sup>74</sup> Maho 1998, 44. Many of these Angolan groups are collectively denoted as Nyemba.

<sup>75</sup> ELCIN = Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (known until 1980s as ELOC = Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church).

<sup>76</sup> The distance from Oniipa in Owamboland to Nkurenkuru in Kavango (central places in the Finnish mission history) is about 300 km, but there was no road and the region between was also practically uninhabited, when the Finns started their work in Nkurenkuru.

<sup>77</sup> In Mbukushu language the king is called *fumu* instead. Malan 1995, 46; Wallace 2011, 80.

<sup>78</sup> Kampungu 1965, 432. – To be sure, a ruler who was too despotic could be overthrown, as happened to a Kwangali king called Mpepo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century according to oral tradition reported by Kampungu 1965, 217.

<sup>79</sup> Kampungu 1965, 437, 440; Eckl 2004, 365.

<sup>80</sup> Kampungu 1965, 435; Eirola et al 1990, 29; Wallace 2011, 80.

<sup>81</sup> Fisch 2004, 176.

<sup>82</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 48, 73; Malan 1995, 47–48.

Earlier, a *hompa* was also looked upon as a religious authority having supernatural powers.<sup>83</sup> His kingship came from God, and he performed some rites like rain-making.<sup>84</sup> Fat had a function of consecration and purification.<sup>85</sup> The succession of royal power was and still is matrilineal, which means that a king's son will never become king.<sup>86</sup> There have also been female rulers such as *hompa* Kanuni, a Kwangali queen regnant who was familiar to many former Finnish missionaries.<sup>87</sup>

The basic source of livelihood in the Kavango area has been and still is subsistence farming. The main staple is pearl millet (*mahangu* in the local language), which is usually eaten as porridge (*yisima*). Other important species are sorghum (*yilya*, mostly used for brewing beer<sup>88</sup>) and maize (*epungu*). Cultivation of crops and the pounding of grain are mainly women's work.<sup>89</sup> Cattle are very important for the people, and animal husbandry is men's work. Traditionally cattle are kept as a symbol of wealth, not for everyday diet. Cattle are also used for ploughing of fields and to pull heavy items in a sledge.<sup>90</sup> Smaller animals like goats and chicken are more common for food.<sup>91</sup> Hunting game used to be more common in the past.<sup>92</sup> Fishing also provides nourishment to people by the river. The most common drink is *sikundu*, fermented of millet like home-made beer, but thick like gruel.<sup>93</sup>

A homestead can house a large extended family. Cousins may be called brothers and sisters, aunts as mothers, so that it is difficult for a westerner to figure out family relations.<sup>94</sup> The huts are for sleeping and storing goods. The "living room" for spending time and meeting visitors does not have walls, but only a roof resting on poles.

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<sup>83</sup> Kampungu 1965, 432, 434; Malan 1995, 46 (referring to Van Tonder 1966); Wallace 2011, 81.

<sup>84</sup> Kampungu 1965, 215, 411, 433; Eckl 2004, 361–363.

<sup>85</sup> Kampungu 1965, 310. Kampungu even believes the Bantu peoples have been in touch with the Hebrew people who anointed their kings with oil.

<sup>86</sup> For example Kampungu 1965, 249, 363, 409. In Kampungu 1965, 201–206 and History of the Vakwangali there are lists the Kwangali kings starting from about 1750. The lists differ on this or that point, but, all in all, the oral tradition seems to be well preserved.

<sup>87</sup> Wallace 2011, 83. According to McGurk & Gibson (1981, 42–43) *hompa* Kanuni ruled in 1924–1941 and again in 1958–1964. History of the Vakwangali extends her later period up to 1971.

<sup>88</sup> Eirola et al 1990, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Eirola et al 1990, 40. At Mbunza Living Museum (2013) the museum guide told that pounding may take even up to six hours per day – it is heavy job.

<sup>90</sup> Eirola et al 1990, 43. According to Fisch 2004, 214, cattle owning is quite a new source of livelihood; hundred years ago it would have attracted robbers and beasts.

<sup>91</sup> Eirola et al 1990, 45–46.

<sup>92</sup> At the Mbunza Living Museum (2013) they showed the traditional hunting bow. Even young boys had to learn to make one.

<sup>93</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 44–46; Malan 1995, 41–43.

<sup>94</sup> Kampungu 1965, 244; Eirola et al 1990, 91.

Wood is also used for dugout canoes. Other common handicrafts include weaving baskets, making fishing instruments and fashioning clay pots. The Kavango people have known traditionally, how to smelt iron. Production of iron was kept a secret from other tribes lest they could come and destroy the smeltery in order to prevail if war broke out. The fireplace of a blacksmith was a taboo for women.<sup>95</sup>

As traditional outfit, the people of Kavango used animal skins,<sup>96</sup> various ornaments and ointment to cover themselves. Especially the women wore several rounds of necklaces made of ostrich shell beads. Women's bodies were smeared with *rukura*, an ointment made of powdered wood mixed with fat. The people also carried charms to protect them from evil. Sometimes incisor teeth were chipped and filed for beauty.<sup>97</sup> Women used to have a hair-dress typical for each ethnic group. Kwangali women wore long braids made of plant fibres.<sup>98</sup> One hair-dress could last for months or a year, then it had to be renewed.<sup>99</sup> Men often shaved their hair away.<sup>100</sup>

A clan system shaped the lives of the people, for example in a way that the spouses-to-be had to be of different clans. Most clans were named after animals like hyena, lion or locust. However, any mystical relationship between the clan members and the totem animals has not been found. A person belongs primarily to his mother's clan.<sup>101</sup> Due to the matrilineal system a maternal uncle has been even "more influential and important than the real father."<sup>102</sup>

Children have been very important. Twins were even a greater blessing than just a single baby. Albino babies were put to death.<sup>103</sup> It was also thought that a marriage was properly established only after a baby was born. The name for a baby was given after a namesake<sup>104</sup> (often a grandparent or other important person for the family), or according to events that happened at the time of birth. Even the

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<sup>95</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 49; recordings made at Mbunza Living Museum 2013.

<sup>96</sup> At the Mbunza Living Museum (2013) they showed part of the process of handling the animal skin to make clothes.

<sup>97</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 49–51.

<sup>98</sup> Kampungu 1965, 316 records the fibre of *mugoro* tree as the material. At Mbunza Living Museum (2013) they showed an aloe plant instead.

<sup>99</sup> Recordings made in Mbunza Living Museum 2013.

<sup>100</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 50.

<sup>101</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 61–63; Malan 1995, 37–38.

<sup>102</sup> Malan 1995, 41 quotes Van Tonder 1966 about Mbukushu. I know the same from missionary rumour.

<sup>103</sup> Förg 1968, 52–53 writes that the albino babies were buried in a termite mound. A missionary rumour has told about giving the albino babies for food to the crocodiles.

<sup>104</sup> Kampungu 1965, 279, 283 calls this "nominal reincarnation."

parents got new names according to their firstborn: I would be called *ZinyaHeikki* (Heikki's mother).<sup>105</sup>

Puberty rites have been typical for indigenous cultures in Africa. Missionaries in Owamboland often wrote about the *ohango* festival, which in their understanding meant playing marriages, and hence they considered it very negatively.<sup>106</sup> From Kavango I have not found much information. The sources mention a rite called *etembu*, where a girl was secluded in a hut for a month at her first menstruation, and another rite called *rufuko* for royal girls.<sup>107</sup>

Earlier it was the parents who decided about marriage for their children. Morality, wealth and diligence were considered in the decisions.<sup>108</sup> There are literary reports of sexual intercourse at a very early age, pre-marital cohabitation in test marriages of a kind, arranged by parents for their children, and sex education by children watching their parents' sexual practises, but one must be sceptical about these stories.<sup>109</sup>

Polygamy has been part of the culture. I have not found any statistics, but "monogamous marriages are said to far outnumber polygamous ones" even in the past.<sup>110</sup> The elite could afford more, but ordinary men usually had a reason, for example barrenness of the first wife, if they took a second one.<sup>111</sup> Divorce was possible, although not considered a very good thing. Adultery was condemned.<sup>112</sup>

When a person died, the body was usually buried on the same day. Evidently in the past the corpse was bent into a fetal position, tied and wrapped in an animal skin and buried facing west. The traditional burying place was a corral for cattle.<sup>113</sup>

In the past there have probably been seasonal ceremonies for the harvest. Kampungu reports about *epemba*, eating of new fruits, *kuteza*, cutting the crops, and *kuhwaga*, threshing.<sup>114</sup> Dancing was included in festivals.<sup>115</sup> Rain-making has

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<sup>105</sup> Kampungu 1965, 279; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 54.

<sup>106</sup> Miettinen 2005, 314–323.

<sup>107</sup> Kampungu 1965, 316, 332.

<sup>108</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 56–58.

<sup>109</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 54–55.

<sup>110</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 59.

<sup>111</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 59, 70.

<sup>112</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 60–61.

<sup>113</sup> McGurk 1981, 86–87, 90; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 71–72.

<sup>114</sup> Kampungu 1965, 343–344.

<sup>115</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 73. Kampungu 1965, 358–360 lists several types of dances: *epera*, *nongoma*, *unyuanga*, *siperu*, *mutjokotjo*, *ruduni*. According to him dances may be for festivals, social, recreational, ritualistic or remedial purposes.

been another type of important ceremony.<sup>116</sup> Mbukushu chiefs were especially famous for rain-making.<sup>117</sup> A black ox symbolising black clouds was sacrificed. There are some reports that there were human sacrifices in the past.<sup>118</sup>

The Kavango people believed in Karunga, God, as the Supreme Being.<sup>119</sup> God lives in heaven, and the sun and the moon are his helpers. He also reveals himself in the wind and is present in the rain.<sup>120</sup> However, “no prayers or sacrifices are directed at him.”<sup>121</sup>

The nucleus of traditional religion has been belief in ancestral spirits, *vadimu*. The people believed that “their relationships do not cease at death.”<sup>122</sup> Prayers and sacrifices were addressed to the ancestral spirits. At a normal home there was a simple shrine for prayers. People prayed, for example, before going to hunt.<sup>123</sup> The first milk of a cow and the first porridge of a new harvest were also thrown against palisade, thus sacrificing to ancestors. Neglecting the ancestors would invite their anger and cause them to punish by diseases and misfortunes.<sup>124</sup>

Witchcraft has been an essential part of traditional religious thinking and practices. Witchcraft was taken to be the cause of a disease or other calamity. There could be a witch, *murodi*, who looked with an evil eye and caused trouble. The *murodi* acts at a distance without coming in touch with his victim.<sup>125</sup> People also believed in ghosts.<sup>126</sup> Even good things, such as a good harvest, happened because of magic. People did not know about manure as fertilisation.<sup>127</sup>

If someone became sick, a traditional healer, *nganga*, was called for help. Obviously the *ngangas* have had true knowledge about herbal medicines and cures such as snapping vertebrae into place. There was probably a psychological

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<sup>116</sup> McGurk 1981, 88; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 73–74; Malan 1995, 51.

<sup>117</sup> Kampungu 1965, 403; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 74; Malan 1995, 36; Maho 1998, 37–39, 43; Wallace 2011, 81.

<sup>118</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 68, 73–74; Malan 1995, 50 (referring to Van Tonder 1996). Also Mbunza Living Museum (2013) confirmed that human sacrifices have been used according to the king’s order.

<sup>119</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 76.

<sup>120</sup> Malan 1995, 49–50.

<sup>121</sup> Malan 1995, 50.

<sup>122</sup> Kampungu 1965, 456.

<sup>123</sup> Recordings made at Mbunza Living Museum 2013. The shrine at the museum was furnished with a small calabash for carrying water, bones for a dog, and some white jewellery to make a person invisible for the bad spirits.

<sup>124</sup> McGurk 1981, 93; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 76; Malan 1995, 51.

<sup>125</sup> McGurk 1981, 93–94; Malan 1995, 53.

<sup>126</sup> Kampungu 1965, 325 notes about *vandumba*, female spirits demanding lives of other people in order to give their services.

<sup>127</sup> Kampungu 1965, 367.



effect of an impressive person, too.<sup>128</sup> However, many remedies they tried were injurious or simply ineffective.<sup>129</sup> Offerings and dancing were often included in healing rituals. A real problem with the *ngangas* has been that they aimed to reveal who was guilty for causing the condition, and much too often an innocent person became persecuted as a guilty.<sup>130</sup> The *nganga* himself has enjoyed “a very high status due to his expert knowledge and his ability to heal and ward off evil.”<sup>131</sup> The missionaries (and other western people) have often misunderstood the concepts and considered the *nganga* as a witch, although the role of the *nganga* is to heal the evil that a witch has caused.<sup>132</sup>

Before the advent of missionaries, Kavango peoples had already been under some foreign influence. There were trading networks connecting the Kavango tribes to the slave trade of the Portuguese<sup>133</sup> and even to Arab traders on the Swahili coast.<sup>134</sup> Slavery was a part of traditional culture in Kavango; slave raids were sometimes done against distant enemies,<sup>135</sup> and most probably the past kings built their prestige on slave trade,<sup>136</sup> but slavery could also compensate for a murder or a theft, and in times of famine one could even sell his relatives for cattle. It seems slavery was so endemic in Kavango that a stubborn child could be disciplined by saying, “Your uncle will sell you.”<sup>137</sup> In 1924 slavery was forbidden by law, but it took time for it to disappear.<sup>138</sup>

## **2.3. General and Church History of Kavango**

### **2.3.1. Early European Influence and German Colonial Era**

The first European to visit the Kwangali was Charles John Andersson in 1859, and it seems that there have been white explorers, traders and hunters occasionally

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<sup>128</sup> Hellberg 2006, 40–41.

<sup>129</sup> Here I have to rely on what I have heard from various missionaries and local people.

<sup>130</sup> McGurk 1981, 94–95. McGurk & Gibson 1981, 74–75 mention several methods of “smelling out” the guilty. According to Förg 1968, 51 the persons accused of sorcery were condemned to death; they often fled to other kingdoms for safety.

<sup>131</sup> Malan 1995, 53 (referring to Van Tonder 1966).

<sup>132</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 74.

<sup>133</sup> Eckl 2004, 391; Wallace 2011, 86–89.

<sup>134</sup> Eckl 2004, 392 (referring to Bierfert 1938).

<sup>135</sup> Wallace 2011, 83. The slaves were, however, “incorporated -- into kin groups [which] granted them a place in the society”.

<sup>136</sup> Fisch 2009, 14. Kampungu 1965, 345 mentions that Kwangali kings “used to sell their subjects to some Angolan tribes dealing with the Portuguese slave trade.”

<sup>137</sup> Fleisch & Möhlig’s account 2002, 286 on Alex Muranda Hamunyera’s history of Ukwangali and Umbunza; Wallace 2011, 100.

<sup>138</sup> Gibson 1981, 31–33; McGurk 1981, 93.

since then. However, European influence remained very limited during the nineteenth century.<sup>139</sup>

In the “(in)famous”<sup>140</sup> Berlin Conference in 1884–1885, nearly the whole of Africa was split into colonies of European states.<sup>141</sup> Portugal and Germany divided the territory along the Kavango River in 1886. In practice, the traditional kings continued to rule.<sup>142</sup> Kavango was very difficult to reach, behind sandy tracks, with no water fountains on the way, and malaria risk awaiting at the destination.<sup>143</sup>

Missionary activity spread in present-day Namibia from south to north during the nineteenth century.<sup>144</sup> Finnish missionaries, invited by the Rhenish Missionary Society, started their work in Owamboland in 1870.<sup>145</sup> The first trip to Kavango by a Finnish missionary took place only in 1926.<sup>146</sup> The Catholics started earlier, but their initial trip to Kavango in 1903 was very difficult. The Kwangali king Himarwa refused to accept missionaries, and two Fathers died of malaria.<sup>147</sup> After several attempts, they finally succeeded in the eastern part of Kavango. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate started a mission station in Nyangana in 1910 and in Andara in 1913.<sup>148</sup>

In the beginning of the colonial era, the Portuguese in Angola had more impact on the local people in Kavango than the Germans did.<sup>149</sup> The Kavango peoples themselves had been living primarily on the Angolan side of the river. As the Portuguese gained influence, however, the natives essentially had two options: either disappear deeper into Angola, which the Shambyu people temporarily did in 1909–1915, or move to the German side in South West Africa.<sup>150</sup> The Portuguese established five forts along the Kavango River, one for each Kavango

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<sup>139</sup> Gibson 1981, 24–25; Wallace 2011, 89.

<sup>140</sup> Spelling by Wallace 2011, 116.

<sup>141</sup> Wallace 2011, 117–121.

<sup>142</sup> Eckl 2004, 14; Wallace 2011, 97–98.

<sup>143</sup> Kampungu 1965, 8–9. According to Eckl 2004, 14 the way to Kavango from the south was called “Durststrecke,” thirst stretch.

<sup>144</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, 9–10, 17–18.

<sup>145</sup> Peltola 1958, 25–32, 38–44.

<sup>146</sup> For example, Kemppainen 1998, 127–128; Muurman 2011, 14–15.

<sup>147</sup> Kampungu 1965, 91–93; Kemppainen 1998, 51–52. Eckl 2004, 39 noted that the king Himarwa still lived on the Portuguese side of the Kavango River. Eckl 2004, 122–125 also pondered why Himarwa refused to take the Catholic missionaries into his area. One possible reason is that the *hompa* was afraid German soldiers would follow the missionaries and end his reign. Another possibility is that he was disappointed by not getting weapons and ammunition from the missionaries.

<sup>148</sup> Gibson 1981, 26; Kemppainen 1998, 53; Eckl 2004, 177, 180; Wallace 2011, 94, 202.

<sup>149</sup> Wallace 2011, 202.

<sup>150</sup> Eckl 2004, 87–90.

kingdom, in 1909.<sup>151</sup> “To counterbalance the increasing Portuguese influence,”<sup>152</sup> the Germans built a police post at Nkurenkuru in 1910.<sup>153</sup> The Kwangali king Kandjimi signed a treaty with the Germans in 1909 to gain protection against the Portuguese.<sup>154</sup>

Although life was relatively peaceful in the north, the Herero in central South West Africa suffered a disaster in 1904–1908, which remains a national trauma for Namibians. Initially they were frustrated by injustices such as the Germans capturing their best grazing fields or indebting them in trade, and attacked the white settlements. The Germans, then, took revenge, and genocide wiped out more than half of the Herero population.<sup>155</sup> White supremacy had thus been shown to the indigenous people. It can be said that the era of apartheid in Namibia was started by German colonialism, even though the term was not yet in use.<sup>156</sup>

However, after eliminating the Hereros, the German authorities faced a new problem: a shortage of labour. Mining was in rapid rise; Tsumeb copper mine opened in 1906 and diamonds were discovered near Lüderitz in 1908. Workers were also needed on farms as the number of new settlers from Germany increased. This widened the contacts between the peoples of the north with Europeans. Although the workforce was a necessity, it was badly abused. Violent punishments and malnutrition were common. Workers also had to carry identification tokens to be allowed to move in the Police Zone<sup>157</sup>.

### **2.3.2. The Early British Mandate**

The First World War brought a change to the rule of South West Africa. In Kavango, the Germans briefly attacked the Portuguese fort Cuangar in 1914 with Kwangali assistance. The other Portuguese forts along the Kavango River were also destroyed.<sup>158</sup> However, the German troops in South West Africa surrendered already in 1915, and the colony formally fell under British rule. The time between 1915 and 1921 was a period of martial law, and since 1921 South Africa ruled the

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<sup>151</sup> Gibson 1981, 24, 28; Eckl 2004, 33.

<sup>152</sup> Gibson 1981, 30 (referring to Singleman 1911).

<sup>153</sup> Eckl 2004, 183, 189; Fisch 2004, 14; Wallace 2011, 202. The place was strategically next to the Kwangali royal court and opposite to the Portuguese fort in Cuangar. Eckl 2004, 105.

<sup>154</sup> Eckl 2004, 64–67; Fisch 2004, 66; Wallace 2011, 211.

<sup>155</sup> Wallace 2011, 155–161, 178.

<sup>156</sup> Wallace 2011, 192–195.

<sup>157</sup> Police Zone refers to central and southern parts of South West Africa, which the Germans designated for white settlement. Wallace 2011, 76, 131.

<sup>158</sup> Eckl 2004, 258–262; Wallace 2011, 206.

country as a mandate on behalf of Great Britain.<sup>159</sup> Kwangali king Kandjimi created good relations with the British rulers as well. The British supported the policy of indirect rule through local kings and headmen, and aimed to disturb the indigenous people as little as possible with foreign influence.<sup>160</sup> In the north, the administration thus remained limited besides the boarder with Angola being made explicit.<sup>161</sup>

South Africa, which in practice occupied South West Africa, was yet weak and poor. The Union of South Africa had been created only in 1910 by uniting former British colonies and Boer republics. The Namibian territory “was to remain a forgotten, marginal and neglected hinterland.”<sup>162</sup> Many mandate laws intended to promote welfare. In 1928, slavery, witchcraft and child prostitution became penal offences, which the administration enforced even in Kavango.<sup>163</sup> However, racial segregation became a general principle, and the value of the black people lay only in providing inexpensive labour.<sup>164</sup>

The period of martial law, together with the devastating famine of 1914–1915, was the first time to generate migrant labour from Kavango in some numbers.<sup>165</sup> If one succeeded, he returned home with items of prestige, such as western style clothing, iron pots and axes. Unfortunately, it seems venereal diseases were brought to Kavango along the same route.<sup>166</sup> The labourers also learned about European culture and modern economy. The significance of migrant work can be described as “an alternative rite of passage for young men.”<sup>167</sup> Their traditional way of life was shattered, they were out of parental control, and needed something to do in the evenings as leisure activities were limited.<sup>168</sup> One way of escaping the hardness of life and finding a new identity was converting to Christianity, although it can be claimed that increasing material wealth was a more significant result.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Fisch 2004, 129; Wallace 2011, 206.

<sup>160</sup> Eckl 2004, 270, 290; Fisch 2004, 13, 23, 64, 66; Wallace 2011, 211. *Hompa* Kandjimi was a ruling figure for more than just *Ukwangali*: according to Fisch 2004, 69, Kandjimi considered the Mbunza as his subjects and threatened even the Gciriku 250 km away.

<sup>161</sup> Wallace 2011, 228. In eastern Kavango this created some tension: the Gciricu and Mbukushu tribes got separate kings to rule on each side of the river. Eckl 2004, 313–320; Fisch 2004, 84.

<sup>162</sup> Wallace 2011, 216.

<sup>163</sup> Fisch 2004, 129–131.

<sup>164</sup> Wallace 2011, 219.

<sup>165</sup> Wallace 2011, 207.

<sup>166</sup> Eckl 2004, 225–228, 232–233.

<sup>167</sup> Nampala 2006, 92.

<sup>168</sup> Miettinen 2005, 261–265.

<sup>169</sup> Kampungu 1965, 71; Wallace 2011, 189–190, 234.

The first Christians in Western Kavango were also results of migrant work. The first Kwangali to be baptised was Mateusa Muzanima, who had been working in Oranjemund (1200 km, as the crow flies, from home). Back at home, many were suspicious of the new faith. As an example, people spoke that the Christians were bewitching others as they had their eyes closed while they prayed.<sup>170</sup>

When the Finnish missionary Närhi made his exploration trip to Nkurenkuru in 1926, he was astonished to find people who were already Christian. Some had been baptised in south, while others had continued teaching Christianity to their fellows although they were not yet baptised themselves. Närhi did not have a permit to work in Kavango, but he could not leave these people without baptism and thus condemn them outside heaven.<sup>171</sup>

The first baptism in Nkurenkuru took place under a tree at the home of Ruben Kandjabu, also known as Looper or Makaranga. The missionaries were soon badly disappointed by his polygamy; instead he had a long and influential career as an interpreter for the colonial administration.<sup>172</sup> Another name to be mentioned here is Benjamin Shilombweleni. He has been called the “Apostle of Kavango” due to his eagerness to preach gospel.<sup>173</sup> In general, it can be argued that the significance of the missionaries has too often been emphasised over the local parish workers or responsible lay people.<sup>174</sup> The native people are the true subjects of the African Christianity. From Owamboland, there is clear data that the real growth in the number of Christians started along with the work of indigenous preachers rather than foreign missionaries.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ausiku 2011, 10–11.

<sup>171</sup> Muurman 2011, 14–15. The story of Närhi’s trip to Kavango can be found in the archives of Lutheran Missionary Society in KA SLA Hha 9 (*Otto Emil Närhin vuosikertomus vuodelta 1926*).

<sup>172</sup> Hans Martin Milk has studied the life of Makaranga and written a book about him in 2004. Makaranga was an opportunist seizing various chances the whites could offer. He was of Angolan origin; he served a trekking Boer and followed him to Grootfontein, where he was baptised in 1920. Becoming Christian fitted together with his new employment by the South African colonial authorities. He moved together with the Native Commissar to Nkurenkuru in 1921 and continued in the service, when the office moved to Rundu in 1936. According to Milk, Makaranga already had three wives, when he was appointed as the elder of the new Nkurenkuru congregation by missionary Närhi in 1926. Närhi’s visit was obviously too short for the truth to have been revealed. Makaranga’s polygamy truly disappointed missionaries. Milk 2004, 150 has found evidence for at least sixteen wives, whereas Ausiku 2011, 20 mentioned only twelve; some of them divorced, so not all were at the same home concurrently.

<sup>173</sup> Toivanen 2009, 9; Ausiku 2011, 19.

<sup>174</sup> Nampala 2006, 12 complains, “The role of Africans in African Christianisation has been largely ignored.” One reason for overemphasising the role of missionaries is the historical sources written by the missionaries, while other sources are hardly available. – However African the Lutheran church was, Kampungu (and there is reason to assume, many others) called the indigenous ELOC members as “Finnish Christians.” As an example, Kampungu 1965, 263. ELOC was the predecessor of ELCIN.

<sup>175</sup> Peltola 1938, 205–215; Buys & Nambala 2003, 26–28.

The new congregation in Nkurenkuru nonetheless needed care, and so the Finnish Missionary Society was obliged to start work on a new area without prior plans. The Finns wanted to send Owambo teachers to serve the Christians in Kavango, but the South African government did not allow black workforce alone. The (German) Rhenish Mission could have been an option as the baptismal teaching to the Christians in Nkurenkuru had been performed by them in the south, but they lacked resources.<sup>176</sup> In the beginning of 1929, Eetu Järvinen came for building work, and later the same year his brother Aatu Järvinen followed, accompanied by his wife Alma, to be the first long-standing missionary couple there.<sup>177</sup> The school and church services were started under a big tree. Missionary Aatu Järvinen also became famous for his medical skills.<sup>178</sup>

The first local Christians were naturally young. Young people have always been more prone to new ideas. On the other hand, the mission invested specifically in the youth. A common form of missionary work was educating foster children at the mission stations. The children were supposed to participate in various household and farming tasks at a time when a mission station was like a self-sufficient farm house. In exchange, they received food, clothing and, first and foremost, education in Christianity and Protestant work ethic. Later this “foster child ministry” developed into real schools and school hostels.<sup>179</sup>

The work of the Finnish mission in Kavango soon expanded. Missionary Aatu Järvinen pleaded with the supporters in Finland by writing: “Brothers and sisters, do we meet anyone from Sambio in heaven? I implore you to answer this.”<sup>180</sup> In several accounts, the former missionaries stated that their most important motivation was the “eternal blessing after death”<sup>181</sup> for the poor people. Yet, saving the “pagans” of Kavango was controversial among the missionaries. Others would rather have expanded the work in Owamboland, since Kavango was considered too remote and financially consuming. In Finland, the supporters of

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<sup>176</sup> Kemppainen 1998, 128, 131; Milk 2004, 48–54.

<sup>177</sup> Muurman 2011, 16.

<sup>178</sup> Ausiku 2011, 22.

<sup>179</sup> In the beginning, many parents opposed their children being educated at the mission stations. The Christianised children would no longer sacrifice to their ancestral spirits, thus breaking the lineage. Obviously a more practical reason was heavier: the school children were out of the labour force at home. Opposition by parents in Owamboland context was analysed by Miettinen 2005, 282–285, but I assume that the same arguments are applicable in Kavango.

<sup>180</sup> LS 1930, 31–32 *Pastori Järvisen kirjelmä Lähetysseuran toveripäiville*. “Veljet ja sisaret, tapaamme ketään Sambion heimosta taivaassa? Pyytäisin siihen teiltä vastausta.” The spelling of Shambyu has varied over time.

<sup>181</sup> For example LS 1930, 34 *Pastori Järvisen kirjelmä Lähetysseuran toveripäiville*. The term has been translated from archaic Finnish “autuus kuoleman jälkeen.”

the mission were nevertheless excited about a new mission field, so the enterprise to evangelise Kavango, starting from Nkurenkuru, got the blessing of the mission.<sup>182</sup>

The order was not to build any more mission stations,<sup>183</sup> but that is precisely what happened. In 1932, mission stations were started in Rupara<sup>184</sup> and in Mupini<sup>185</sup>. The missionaries saw that work was urgently needed amidst heathens. The biggest reason for the quick expansion, however, seems to have been the competition with the Catholicism.<sup>186</sup> The number of Christians was increasing; by 1939, there were about 1,000 Lutheran and about 2,700 Roman Catholic Christians in the Kavango area.<sup>187</sup>

In 1939, the Finnish missionaries succeeded to send the first students from Kavango to Owamboland for further education. For some of them studying on a “foreign land” turned out to be too heavy, but Alfeus Kangayi, Elia Neromba, Markus Ihemba and Matias Sikondomboro finished their studies and came back to Kavango as the first indigenous teachers.<sup>188</sup> Three of them were later trained as pastors, and one became a nurse.<sup>189</sup>

1930s also saw the tightening control of South African colonial administration.<sup>190</sup> In Kavango, the Native Commissioner of South Africa first settled at the former German police station in Nkurenkuru; from 1936 he was resident in Rundu.<sup>191</sup> The main task of the South African officials was to

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<sup>182</sup> Kemppainen 1998, 147–150; Muurman 2011, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Kemppainen 1998, 149.

<sup>184</sup> Rupara is located about 60 km from Nkurenkuru eastwards.

<sup>185</sup> Mupini is located about 130 km from Nkurenkuru and only 10 km from Rundu. The central town of Kavango, Rundu, did not yet exist, but started to take shape four years later, when the government post was moved there. Nkurenkuru is near the western end of Kavango. – The hard competition with the Catholics was most visible in the foundation of Mupini mission station. The missionaries had first chosen another location in Ruga and started making bricks there. During the weekends the Catholics started constructing their own mission station in the same place, and the Finns were forced to move further. Kemppainen 1998, 157–158.

<sup>186</sup> Muurman 2011, 19–21. In 1926 (the year of Närhi’s visit), the South African administration decided to open the work to all missions; this far the region had been divided so that only one denomination could work in an area. Miettinen 2005, 96–97. In fact, the Finnish work in Kavango became possible exactly from the same reason, removing the restrictions from working in the same area where other missions were already functioning. The Catholics had built a mission station in the Kwangali area in Tondoro in 1927, before the Finns established theirs in Nkurenkuru. Kemppainen 1998, 130–132.

<sup>187</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, 117.

<sup>188</sup> Ausiku 2011, 27.

<sup>189</sup> Ausiku 2011, 89, 91.

<sup>190</sup> Kemppainen 1998, 161–162.

<sup>191</sup> Fisch 2004, 133; Wallace 2011, 233. Until 1930 the office was called Officer in Charge of Native Affairs and since then Assistant Native Commissioner. He was led from Windhoek.

guarantee peace and order. On one hand, they tried to reassert the power of traditional rulers, and on the other, they imposed new laws and decrees.<sup>192</sup>

Major social transformations followed due to migrant labour and the spreading of Christianity. The state policy was the opposite, to keep the traditional societies as they had “always” been.<sup>193</sup> For example, the Commissar of Native Affairs Harold Eedes, who was in charge of Kavango from 1932 to 1946, had a reputation of playing the traditional leaders against the Catholic mission.<sup>194</sup> At the same time, the racial stereotyping was strengthened from the part of the whites.<sup>195</sup>

### 2.3.3. The Apartheid Era

It seems that proper history writing concerning the time after the Second World War is yet to arrive. Many documents, also produced by black Africans themselves, exist, but at the same time the arguments are debated. The time within living memory “holds continued political significance” and is thus more controversial to be put in writing.<sup>196</sup> Nonetheless, the number of Christians in the north kept increasing through the era. Children flooded to the schools and adults to baptismal education.<sup>197</sup> Local pastors and evangelists or catechists were educated. Catholic Father Hartmann described their effectiveness, “Their word penetrated also those hearts that had been stubbornly closed from conversion until this.”<sup>198</sup> The situation was similar on the Lutheran side.

When the work was in the hands of the local people, their fellow countrymen took the church as their own. In Owamboland, the first native pastors had been ordained already in 1925;<sup>199</sup> in Kavango, the first Kwangali pastor Matias Sikondomboro started his work in 1942.<sup>200</sup> The decision to found an

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<sup>192</sup> Fisch 2004, 225. In the initial phase, Native Commissioners served only for short terms, yet they are remembered by local nicknames. As an anecdote, the medic Anderson was called *Kasinganga*, a bad doctor, because he had to restrict recruiting of migrant labour due to the worldwide economic depression and he thus registered many of the job seekers as sick or unfit. Fisch 2004, 133–134, 147.

<sup>193</sup> Wallace 2011, 234.

<sup>194</sup> Fisch 2009, 36–37.

<sup>195</sup> Wallace 2011, 237.

<sup>196</sup> Wallace 2011, 243.

<sup>197</sup> For example, Laukkanen 2002, 42 and Fisch 2009, 17.

<sup>198</sup> Quoted by Fisch 2009, 69. “*Ihr Wort drang auch in jene Herzen, die sich bisher hartnäckig der Bekehrung verschlossen hatten.*”

<sup>199</sup> Mietinen 2005, 153.

<sup>200</sup> Ausiku 2011, 53. Matias Sikondomboro came from a family of traditional healers and was a talented storyteller. One example of his talents was the following occasion: He surprised youngsters, who, inspired by a visiting prophet, were criticising the shortcomings of their church. He posed as a traditional doctor, used his charms, and divined misfortune for each one of the listeners. The boys were horrified about his behaviour. Finally he ended his show: “Had Christ not found a way to this congregation, you would have this kind of shepherd and this kind of church



independent Evangelical Lutheran Ambo-Kavango Church (ELOC) was made in 1954.<sup>201</sup> Leonard Auala became the first bishop of the church in 1963.<sup>202</sup>

The year 1947 marked a change of the Finnish workforce. Several missionaries returned to Finland, and many new ones arrived in their place. The Second World War had cut normal connections to Finland and the mission simply had to survive. The positive effect was that the local members of the church had to take more responsibility.<sup>203</sup> After the war, the mission expanded again: a mission station in Mpungu<sup>204</sup> was opened in 1951, and a congregation in Rundu was started in 1957.<sup>205</sup>

The town of Rundu was growing around the government post, and the first parish members in Rundu were Christians working for the government. A government hospital was also opened in Rundu. Initially, it specialised in treating leprosy.<sup>206</sup> The number of Lutheran Christians in Rundu increased clearly as a secondary school was opened by the government in 1967, and the first youths wrote their matriculation examinations in Kavango in 1972.<sup>207</sup> The Christians in Rundu were first assisted by missionary Pentti Toivanen, working in Mupini. The beginning of the Rundu congregation with the name Nkarapamwe is counted from 1969, when it got its first local pastor Elia Neromba.<sup>208</sup> Johannes Sindano, who was elected in 2003 as the first and so far the only bishop of ELCIN coming from Kavango, started as a pastor in Rundu in 1982.<sup>209</sup>

Schools have always occupied a central position in the mission. Missionaries organised the education at mission stations and subsidiary chapels, but native Africans, in the beginning mostly from Owamboland, carried the responsibility of much of the school work in practice.<sup>210</sup> In the 1940s, the South

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service.” Jantunen 1958, 84–89 has saved the happening in a belletrist form. The words of the pastor as told by Jantunen: “*Jollei Kristus olisi löytänyt tietä tähän seurakuntaan, tällainen olisi teillä paimen ja tällainen jumalanpalvelus.*”

<sup>201</sup> Peltola 1958, 242; Laukkanen 2002, 121. The name of the church was later changed to Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN).

<sup>202</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, 230.

<sup>203</sup> Peltola 1958, 241; Ausiku 2011, 93.

<sup>204</sup> Mpungu is located inland about 50 km from Nkurenkuru. Many visitors to the small hospital there were San.

<sup>205</sup> Ausiku 2011, 32,34.

<sup>206</sup> Ausiku 2011, 35. A couple of Finnish missionary nurses as well as the first Kwangali nurse Markus Ihemba worked at Rundu hospital.

<sup>207</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 14–15; Ausiku 2011, 36.

<sup>208</sup> Ausiku 2011, 36.

<sup>209</sup> Ausiku 2011, 37.

<sup>210</sup> Okavango 1958, 127–151; Sieviläinen 1998, 14–15; Ausiku 2011, 43–47. By the 1950s, the school system of the Finnish mission in Kavango had developed to consist of very simple bush schools, government supported elementary schools in a few villages, dormitory schools at the

African government started to pay attention to education in Kavango, and essentially took full responsibility in 1960.<sup>211</sup> Kampungu, in many of his comments critical towards the Finnish mission, wrote in 1965, “Their schools and outstations are doing tremendous good to the people in the ways of civilization and christianity.”<sup>212</sup> Missionary Pentti Toivanen, based on his experience, writes that the ideas concerning the freedom of Namibia started to grow as the people gained literacy. In 1960, the majority of the native population was still illiterate; within a decade, the majority could read.<sup>213</sup>

Language issues make part of the picture of the mission in Kavango. The Finnish missionaries who originally came from Owamboland spoke the Ndonga language and brought along Bible stories, hymn book and Catechism written in Ndonga. Thus, Ndonga became almost a “holy language” in Kavango,<sup>214</sup> before the young missionaries, Tuulikki Jantunen among others, realised that the people actually spoke very differently. There was a long debate within the mission in favour of savings achieved by sticking to one language only. Forming the independent ELOC church improved the status of the Kwangali language drastically; it was taken as one of the official languages of the church.<sup>215</sup> In the language question, the Catholics did better than the Lutherans: The first piece of literature in the Kwangali language was a Catholic catechism in 1932.<sup>216</sup> Bible translation work was hindered due to the political situation,<sup>217</sup> but the Kwangali New Testament was finally published in 1974 and the whole Bible in 1988. The work was completed by Lutherans and Catholics together, which indicates huge progress in ecumenical relations.<sup>218</sup> The decisive impulse for co-operation came from the Language Bureau of the South West African government, but it seems

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mission stations, and a girls’ school in Nkurenkuru and a boys’ school in Rupara. All of these schools were more or less on primary school level, but they are listed in the order of increasing standard. The children learnt reading and writing, calculating, Afrikaans language, Bible stories and Catechism. Besides “academic” skills, they also did a lot of practical work, such as chopping firewood and building furniture or cooking and sewing clothes. The Catholic Church maintained a similar type of school system, actually with more schools in Kavango than the Finnish mission had. For example, Fisch 2009, 53–57, 81–85.

<sup>211</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 14; Lehtonen 1999, 142; Fisch 2009, 82. The government orders included regular attendance at the school. To keep the pupils around, boarding schools were made a norm.

<sup>212</sup> Kampungu 1965, 77.

<sup>213</sup> Toivanen 2001, 8.

<sup>214</sup> Muurman 2011, 30.

<sup>215</sup> Laukkanen 2002, 121.

<sup>216</sup> Laukkanen 2002, 115–116.

<sup>217</sup> Laukkanen 2002, 144. The international contacts of South Africa, including those of South African Bible Society, were broken off as the apartheid strengthened.

<sup>218</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 15; Laukkanen 2002, 145.

that the time was ripe for coming closer.<sup>219</sup> The Bible translation work greatly advanced Kwangali as a literary language.<sup>220</sup>

After the Second World War, migrant labour had an ever-increasing economic importance: men started to take multiple contracts which led to prolonged stays in the south, and married men, too, migrated for work. This caused a shortage of labour in local agriculture and decreased production. Living far away from the family for long periods of time made divorces more common, and not too seldom the men had second families in the south.<sup>221</sup> Monetary economy was penetrating Kavango; cash was also gained from selling cattle, handicrafts and wood carvings.<sup>222</sup>

While other colonial powers withdrew from their possessions in Africa, South Africa did the opposite and tried to make Namibia its fifth province. Concurrently with the tightening grip of South Africa, protest movements began to arise in Namibia. The leading forces in the protest were the migrant workers and the few educated Namibians. After some weaker organisations, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation) emerged as "the dominant liberation movement"<sup>223</sup> and would later become the ruling party of independent Namibia. Churches acted for liberation on their part. Apartheid was probably less fierce in Namibia than in South Africa. Namibians were still largely rural dwellers, and the ideology of resistance grew in shanty towns around the cities and cramped boarding houses of the mining communities.<sup>224</sup> In Owamboland, poverty grew as the population increased and accessible land decreased. In Kavango, on the contrary, there was land available for agriculture and cattle, and the migrant workers were clearly fewer than in Owamboland.<sup>225</sup>

In late 1950s, both United Nations and South Africa made plans about dividing Namibia into independent Bantustans. The dwarf states thus created, Okavangoland being one of them, would not have survived on their own.<sup>226</sup> While the plans included valuable investments to infrastructure and public services, the

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<sup>219</sup> Laukkanen 2002, 126.

<sup>220</sup> Laukkanen 2002, 146.

<sup>221</sup> Miettinen 2005, 115–116.

<sup>222</sup> Gibson 1981, 31.

<sup>223</sup> Wallace 2011, 250.

<sup>224</sup> Wallace 2011, 243–251.

<sup>225</sup> Wallace 2011, 255–256.

<sup>226</sup> Wallace 2011, 260–264.

reserves remained “places of extreme poverty,” and the dependence on South Africa increased.<sup>227</sup>

The apartheid policies applied to Namibia led SWAPO “to adopt a military strategy”<sup>228</sup> in the 1960s. The missionaries were initially irritated by political activity, especially in Owamboland. They tried to balance between obedience to the legitimate government and sympathy towards the natives. By the 1970s, many missionaries were already openly critical of the apartheid rule – and had problems renewing their visas.<sup>229</sup> The history of the Finnish mission after the 1950s remains largely unwritten. The mission itself, however, continued as faithfully as possible.

In 1971, a sub-committee of the United Nations Security Council declared the occupation of Namibia illegal. The Lutheran churches in Namibia wrote the so-called Open Letter to Prime Minister Vorster, which was also circulated among their congregations. They called for freedom of speech and human rights, encouraged political mobilisation, and conveyed information from abroad. The international community was already largely supporting Namibia and condemning apartheid.<sup>230</sup>

The situation of the neighbouring countries was also reflected in Namibia. In 1975, Angola gained independence from Portugal, followed by a civil war which would last three decades.<sup>231</sup> Southern Africa, including Kavango, essentially became a front of the Cold War due to American and Soviet backing of the various parties.<sup>232</sup> In 1976, the United Nations declared SWAPO “the ‘sole authentic’ representative of the Namibian people.”<sup>233</sup> The name “Namibia” was also formally adopted by the United Nations. In 1978, the Security Council of the United Nations formulated the famous Resolution 435, which was to lead to UN-supervised elections for an independent Namibia.<sup>234</sup>

Meanwhile, northern Namibia was increasingly transforming into a war zone. The conflict hit Kavango in 1979<sup>235</sup> and intensified throughout the 1980s, as

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<sup>227</sup> Wallace 2011, 266–267.

<sup>228</sup> Wallace 2011, 268.

<sup>229</sup> Miettinen 2005, 156–157.

<sup>230</sup> Wallace 2011, 274–275. Also Nampala 2006, 98–101, who is otherwise critical against the mission in cultural matters, credits the church for the resistance against colonialism as shown in the Open Letter.

<sup>231</sup> Wallace 2011, 279–285.

<sup>232</sup> Wallace 2011, 297.

<sup>233</sup> Wallace 2011, 288.

<sup>234</sup> Wallace 2011, 289.

<sup>235</sup> In 1979, PLAN, the military wing of SWAPO, attacked the Catholic mission in Tondoro and abducted more than one hundred students to Angola. The same week, skilled South African soldiers were needed to repair the generator hit by lightning, which led to increased activity by

an increasingly paranoid SWAPO waged guerrilla warfare against South Africa from bases on the Angolan side. Economic problems caused more and more Namibians to move into towns, often only to be disappointed.<sup>236</sup> Yet at this stage, “people living in rural areas were generally worse off than those in towns.”<sup>237</sup>

Eventually, South Africa and Soviet Union began to withdraw from the conflict due to the extreme costs involved. The negotiations to lead to independence started in May 1988, and the transition was to start in February 1989. This nearly failed, as SWAPO sent their fighters back home across the border too early. A lot of diplomacy was required, but free elections were finally held in December 1989, and “euphoria”<sup>238</sup> of independence was in the air. The process of creating the new constitution can be described by “willingness to compromise that surprised many observers,”<sup>239</sup> and the constitution contains fundamental human rights. Independence was formally declared on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1990.<sup>240</sup>

#### **2.3.4. In an Independent Namibia**

Nowadays, the culture is undergoing rapid change due to modern influences. All children are supposed to go to school. Healthcare is run by the government. During the 25-year period that I have seen, my “home town” Nkurenkuru has changed from a rural village with traditional huts into the capital of Kavango West Region with its offices, shopping facilities and brick houses built along streets according to the town plan. This kind of change naturally includes big social transformations. With formal education, people are supposed to get jobs and earn money instead of rearing their livestock and ploughing their fields.

Wallace estimates that “Namibia has established itself as a stable, peaceful and relatively prosperous country.”<sup>241</sup> The Namibian government has implemented a policy of national reconciliation and “attempted to set aside the conflicts of the past.”<sup>242</sup> South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994 naturally helped the situation of its neighbour.<sup>243</sup>

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SWAPO. It seems that the already retired pastor Matias Sikondomboro was shot dead in connection to these events. Laukkanen 2002, 153.

<sup>236</sup> Wallace 2011, 298–301.

<sup>237</sup> Wallace 2011, 301.

<sup>238</sup> Wallace 2011, 306.

<sup>239</sup> Wallace 2011, 307.

<sup>240</sup> Wallace 2011, 305–307.

<sup>241</sup> Wallace 2011, 309.

<sup>242</sup> Wallace 2011, 309. As far as I have seen, Namibia has succeeded well. Opposing voices, however, exist. I have heard my friends in Kavango speaking that the government, filled with

The worst internal problem has been the spreading of HIV/AIDS. Wallace gives a figure of 22 % of Namibian adults having been HIV-positive in 2002. Especially children have been affected, many becoming orphans. In theory, the government has made anti-retroviral medication available to everyone in need, but in reality, there are not enough stocks everywhere. Namibia is also a country of extreme differences of income; “the majority of Namibians are still living in grinding poverty.”<sup>244</sup> The San people have largely remained outside the development.<sup>245</sup>

The dean of the Kavango diocese of ELCIN, Asser Lihongo, described the situation of the church in Kavango in 1992 in a rather pessimistic manner. According to him, help from Finnish missionaries was still greatly needed. Due to long distances and few available vehicles, participation in church activities was difficult for many. There was a lack of employees and a lack of funds. Other churches and sects were spreading.<sup>246</sup> In 1992, there were about 24,000 members of ELCIN in the Eastern Deanery (which practically means Kavango) and about 60,000 or 70,000 Roman Catholics in Kavango.<sup>247</sup>

During independence, there have been a few Finnish missionaries in Kavango. Most of them, including me, have been teachers at ELCIN Nkurenkuru High School. The school was a major enterprise in Namibia founded with Finnish development aid. The foundations for the project were laid already in the 1980s, as Kwangali *hompa* Daniel Sientu Mpasi was worried about the government neglecting development among his people. There were schools in the region, but very few students passed their examinations. Classes were big, many teachers unqualified and the discipline not adequate. ELCIN Nkurenkuru High School was opened in 1990, right before independence.<sup>248</sup> The school started with a single class of students, and many of the first teachers worked for shorter terms on a voluntary basis. The school eventually claimed its place among the top schools in the whole country.<sup>249</sup> The last Finnish missionary couple left Kavango in 2013.<sup>250</sup>

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SWAPO members, only promotes the interests of the Owambo and forgets about the smaller ethnic groups.

<sup>243</sup> Wallace 2011, 309–310.

<sup>244</sup> Wallace 2011, 313. The Gini index that measures the distribution of wealth among citizens sets Namibia as the seventh worst in the world. CIA World Factbook Namibia 2017.

<sup>245</sup> Wallace 2011, 312–314.

<sup>246</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 13 referring to dean Lihongo’s speech in the Finnish missionaries annual meeting 20.6.1992.

<sup>247</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 13.

<sup>248</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 16–17.

<sup>249</sup> Sieviläinen 1998, 19, 102.

### 3. Christianity as Experienced by the Informants

#### 3.1. *Short Biographies of the Informants in Regard to Christianity*

This chapter introduces my informants so that the reader can understand who they are when their opinions come forward in the analysis. The informants were first asked to tell about their personal lives as Christians. Some of them spoke extensively, so their biography is presented in more detail. I have picked out information that is relevant later in this study. The persons are introduced in the order in which I happened to interview them.

My very first attempt to interview people from Kavango about Christianity and former religious traditions was by e-mail several years before the actual study. The only person to answer my request was **Mr C**. He is a high school teacher. I have included his answers to this study because he offers an example of an active member of an African Pentecostal type church, Deeper Life Bible Church. Mr C simply reasoned that he is a Christian because he wants “to go to heaven one day.”<sup>251</sup> He criticised the Catholic Church, member of which he had been earlier, for holding doctrines in a higher position than the Bible and even warning ordinary people against reading the Bible very much. Mr C is very active in Bible study.<sup>252</sup>

Mr **Christoph Hamurenge** was the first informant with whom I personally talked. He is working as a university lecturer in the field of communications at the University of Namibia. Unfortunately the recording failed, and I have to draw upon written notes only, not transcriptions of his speech. That is a pity, because Mr Hamurenge really had a lot to say. He was also genuinely interested in this study and was clearly unhappy that there existed so little written material about Kavango, as we could observe in the university library with him. Mr Hamurenge seemed to know the past traditions of his people much better than others in his age group.<sup>253</sup>

Mr Hamurenge had grown up in a Lutheran family, although his mother was Catholic. His Christianity goes back to his grandmother, who was baptised in Mupini after her polygamous husband died; she had been one of three wives.<sup>254</sup> For Mr Hamurenge Christianity gives “purpose and order in life.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Circular letter by Suvi and Janne Dahlsten 10.5.2013.

<sup>251</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>252</sup> Mr C's e-mails 1.10.2008, 19.2.2009 and 28.5.2010.

<sup>253</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>254</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>255</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

The first interview to actually take place in Kavango was that of *otate*<sup>256</sup> **Isak Veijo**. He is a retired engineer with a diploma from Great Britain, and has been working in various government and church jobs. When staying at home in Nkurenkuru he used to be a volunteer church organist playing an old pedal harmonium. At the time of the interview he was in charge of the ELCIN Kavango Christian Education Office. He is also one of the Kwangali traditional authorities.<sup>257</sup>

*Otate* Isak Veijo's family has been Christian as far as he can remember. The family name Veijo, most obviously of Finnish origin, goes back to his grandfather, who came from Owamboland together with the first Finnish missionaries in Kavango in the latter half of the 1920s. When a congregation was formed in Nkurenkuru, all of Isak Veijo's grandparents moved to assist the church there. His parents, then, met in Nkurenkuru, and the family remained there.<sup>258</sup> This makes him a Kwangali, so the limits of ethnic groups are more porous than westerners might think.

Isak Veijo's grandfather was a practical man and specialised in carpentry. On his mother's side there have been preachers in the family. *Otate* Isak Veijo has obviously inherited both skills. Christianity has always been a natural part of his life, and he saw involvement in church activities as very important in growing as a Christian. Already as an adolescent he took part in the "Bushman mission" of the church. He has also been involved in Christian youth work and music work. When ELCIN Nkurenkuru High School was founded, he helped the Finnish missionaries there. He has also been involved in translating, publishing and distributing church literature.<sup>259</sup>

*Otate* Isak Veijo introduced me to **an Angolan woman**. She had been baptised recently, probably in the previous year. Until then she had been living according to old Angolan traditions. I was very interested to see someone who was new in her Christian faith, hoping to interview her about her past. Unfortunately I was not able to come to much depth with this interview. The woman was selling vegetables at a marketplace, and gave only short answers.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> *Otate* is a form of address for a man, literally meaning father, but more often used like Mr or Uncle. In this study I am using this word as a respectful title for male informants older than myself. The corresponding term for a woman is *onane*.

<sup>257</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>258</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>259</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>260</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013.



The basic story is, however, as follows. The woman had a problem with her eye, so she came to a hospital in Namibia. (The countryside of Angola is far less developed than Namibia due to the decades of a civil war, which ended finally in 2002.) While in Namibia she started going to church. In fact, she had already visited a Catholic church in Angola, but at that time was not yet interested in baptism. She explained that in ELCIN she could understand much better. I first thought that this was due to complicated Catholic ritual, but finally concluded that it was simply a matter of different languages used in the churches.<sup>261</sup>

The woman did not know her age, and was not able to read or write. *Otate Isak Veijo* explained: “They were in the war... People didn’t have the opportunity to learn. Now it’s only the kids who are starting to learn.”<sup>262</sup> Then we heard that the woman’s family had become dispersed in the civil war, so that she no longer knew of the fate or whereabouts of her loved ones. It was a touching moment with the woman, and I wished she would get new “family members” at the church, but then she went on to sell her tomatoes.<sup>263</sup>

Mr A, a young Namibian teacher, offers a good example of a modern educated African. He told about himself:

I’m a Christian. So, to say a Christian to the faith. I was baptised. Though it was not when I was a baby. I was baptised, when I was maybe, let’s say, 8 years old. -- That time ELCIN did not have this changed opportunity of baptising kids, whose parents are not married. -- So I grew up knowing I’m a Christian, because once baptised become a Christian. -- I came to ELCIN church and the school here. Then I was confirmed at the same church. -- So that is to reaffirm my strength of my belief in the Christian faith. That’s basically what makes me think I’m a Christian. I attend the church. Though I stopped going today for Holy Communion because... I have -- kids. The fiancée and me are not yet married. That’s why I’m not...<sup>264</sup>

Baptism and confirmation were the basic elements to make Mr A consider himself as a Christian. Obviously the fact that the church has very strict sexual norms was a sore spot to him as it is to many young Namibians.

Mr A also had an experience of being a “deeper believer” for some time. Pentecostal type African churches are rapidly spreading and attract a lot of young people. Mr A had been involved with some of his classmates. According to him these churches regulate the whole life, for example the style of clothing, and believers should be worshipping and praying almost all the time. Mr A could not cope with the requirements for long, and returned to ELCIN, his old church.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013.

<sup>262</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013 as interpreted by Isak Veijo.

<sup>263</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013.

<sup>264</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>265</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

**Mr B** is a kitchen worker at a school. A man's strength is truly needed in stirring a huge cauldron for hundreds of students. Despite the job, his low income is causing problems in finding enough money for his large family. For example, he was heavily criticising the use of school uniforms and choir garments, because too much money is needed for them. In general Mr B is a very friendly and cheerful person. His English is simple, but enough to communicate. When I first asked his opinion about Christianity, the answer was: "I'm just only believing in God, believe in the church. Yes."<sup>266</sup>

Mr B has always been Christian, his parents were Christians and probably even his grandparents. Of the great-grandparents he was not so sure. He could confirm that there was once a time when the people believed "according to the traditional."<sup>267</sup> As a child Mr B went to Sunday school. His parents also taught him to pray each morning: "Let's go to give thanks to God, because God the one give us to be wake up."<sup>268</sup> In his youth Mr B attended the ELCIN Kavango Bible School for two years, which was a remarkable time for him.<sup>269</sup>

**Otate Heikki Ausiku** was a key expert to tell about Kwangali traditions. He has a position of a tribal authority. He is a theologian by education, and he has worked as a pastor and Bible school principal. When Namibia became independent he was involved in politics, and just prior to his retirement he was the first mayor of Nkurenkuru as it became a town in 2006.<sup>270</sup> Heikki Ausiku has compiled a booklet about the history of ELCIN in Kavango in the Kwangali language.<sup>271</sup>

*Otate* Heikki Ausiku did not tell much about his personal story in the interview, but I heard that his parents were first-generation Christians. His mother had followed her sister to be taught at the mission station. These sisters were still so young that they did not wear women's hairdo. According to Heikki Ausiku they never got the traditional hair, but even then they had to be shaved bald before the baptism. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku also had memories of former Finnish missionaries and the first Kwangali clergyman Matias Sikondomboro.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>267</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>268</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>269</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>270</sup> Nkurenkuru 2016.

<sup>271</sup> Ausiku 2011.

<sup>272</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

The next informant I met was a 20-year-old student in Rundu, and she was a **confirmation candidate** at the time of the interview. She conceded that she was more eager to go to church as a child than later. Children were taught nice songs, for example. As a young adult there are so many other things to do. She was currently living at the home of her relatives, and her duties were to take care of children, cook for them, bathe them and wash their clothes. She also needed time for her assignments at school. In her free time she enjoyed attending music performances, but she also participated in youth meetings of the church.<sup>273</sup>

The confirmation candidate explained her reasons for attending confirmation classes: “Because I want to finish the Christianity that my parents got for me, when I was still young. And I want to be a Christian.”<sup>274</sup> As I tried to get deeper, whether it was her own will or what the parents demanded, her answer seemed to be both: “From parents and myself also. -- I want to bring, what they started, to bring it to myself, and understand, what really it means to me.”<sup>275</sup>

The confirmation candidate was not much aware about the traditions before Christianity. She had heard something about ancestors, and she also knew that in the past the people used to wear animal skins. But she had only seen traditional clothing “which they wear when they are dancing culture,”<sup>276</sup> and those are modernised versions. Her grandparents had died before she was born, so they had not passed tradition directly to her.<sup>277</sup> She was, however, able to compare her mother’s youth to her own:

For those years school was not that important like for us. For them what was important is to grow crops, go to the farm, yeah, that was important for them. For school was not that much. And getting married at the early age. They even have to... even if you don’t appreciate the husband that they brought for you, you have to marry him.<sup>278</sup>

**Otate Johannes Sindano** has been a bishop of the Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). At the time of the interview he was already retired. He explained his own history very thoroughly. An abbreviated version follows here.

Bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano’s family is of Angolan origin. He was reared by his uncle since he was six years old. The uncle was a businessman transporting goods, especially second-hand clothes, from Congo and present-day

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<sup>273</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>274</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>275</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>276</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>277</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>278</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

Zambia for sale. At a nearby mission station<sup>279</sup> there was a school where his uncle worked as a teacher although he was not baptised yet. At the uncle's home young Johannes learned Bible stories and hymns from missionaries in the late 1940s.<sup>280</sup>

In 1953 the family moved from Angola to South West Africa. The family tried to send Johannes to a Roman Catholic school in Shambyu, but he wanted to study at the school of the Finnish mission. Without money and the uncle's consent, however, it was not possible, so he went as a contract worker to a farm down south to earn some money. It was a tough experience because of the rude employer and the apartheid regime police, but he survived.<sup>281</sup>

Finally in 1960 he managed to get to the Finnish mission school in Mupini. He was a fast learner, and missionaries would have been happy to educate him to be a pastor. Johannes resisted these plans. He passed his matriculation examination in a government school in Rundu and considered the career of a teacher, which would have guaranteed a better salary than the church could pay. Instead of entering teachers' training, however, he decided to go into business, of which he already had experience. *Cuca*, a mildly alcoholic drink, was especially profitable.<sup>282</sup> Missionary Veikko Teinilä was not happy about his business and wrote to him:

"Johannes, we hear that you are now building a very beautiful home. But do you remember that we have a very beautiful home in heaven? There is one thing, which is not good in my opinion: you are selling alcohol and you make the whole Africa drunken."<sup>283</sup>

Johannes Sindano stopped the *Cuca* business for a while, but the chaos caused by the Angolan civil war brought him back to it. He felt that he was obliged to help his friends. So he went over to Angola with his son Johannes, whom he had promised to give to God's work instead of himself. Upon returning from a trip to Angola, however, the men fell from their boat and nearly drowned in the strong current. When their feet finally reached solid ground, the elder Johannes understood that God had saved him and that he should become a pastor himself.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> The denomination is unknown. At least this mission did not baptise children. Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>280</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>281</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>282</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013. *Cuca* used to be Portuguese beer sold in the Angolan side of the river. Eirola et al 1990, 66.

<sup>283</sup> Citation like Johannes Sindano told it in his interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>284</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

Soon Bishop Leonard Auala came to visit the congregation in Rundu, and Johannes Sindano wrote an application for theological studies. He was granted a permit to study theology in South Africa, although the police suspected him of political activity. Later, for family reasons, he moved back to Namibia to continue his studies at Paulinum, the theological institute. In 1981 he was ordained and later served many years as a pastor in Rundu, his hometown. He was inaugurated bishop of the ELCIN Eastern Diocese on April 4, 2004. (The date, the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, was the same when he almost drowned in 1975.)<sup>285</sup>

Bishop Sindano helped me to find the next interviewee *onane*<sup>286</sup> **Rebekka Kambundu**. This charming old lady is a headman, *foromani* (an Africanised form of foreman), in Rundu and comes from the Shambyu royal family.<sup>287</sup> Her story is also briefly presented in Heikki Ausiku's booklet of Kavango church history.<sup>288</sup> Rebekka Kambundu truly remembered a lot, but unfortunately my skills in local languages were not enough to follow everything, and I could not get a precise translation from my interpreter Mr Semethe.

*Onane* Rebekka Kambundu had been baptised by the Finnish missionary Aatu Järvinen as a young girl together with her family at the mission station in Rupara.<sup>289</sup> The family, however, was from Shambyu, where a Lutheran teacher from Oniipa<sup>290</sup> had taught the catechism to villagers under a tree.<sup>291</sup> There was some Lutheran influence, then, also in the eastern part of Kavango, although the area is mainly Catholic.<sup>292</sup>

It was *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu's parents who decided to become Christians. They

could see from the others, who were born to church, to Catholic, to the Roman, so then they could see the goodness in the Christianity. Then when ELCIN came, they joined now ELCIN church. -- It's about the preaching, now they preached God's words and encourage the people to leave the witchcraft. -- You really feel good and you realise that this witchcraft... It's better to believe in God, to have that faith.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>286</sup> *Onane* is a title for a woman, corresponding to *otate* for a man.

<sup>287</sup> According to Fisch 2009, 62, *onane* Rebekka Kambundu was even the first in line to inherit the position of Shambyu *hompa*, but another person was chosen instead.

<sup>288</sup> Ausiku 2011, 40.

<sup>289</sup> According to Ausiku 2011, 39, *onane* Rebekka Kambundu's baptism took place in 1933. Aatu Järvinen worked in Nkurenkuru 1929–1936 and 1948–1951. Ausiku 2011, 93.

<sup>290</sup> Oniipa is the location of the central offices of the Lutheran church (nowadays called ELCIN) in northern Namibia.

<sup>291</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>292</sup> From Ausiku 2011, 39, one can conclude that the beginning of the teaching work in Shambyu was in 1931. According to Kempainen 1998, 190, the work in Shambyu was practically lost by 1936. There was a bush school manned by an Owambo teacher for a few years.

<sup>293</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013, interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe.

Both *onane* Rebekka Kambundu and her interpreter Mr Semethe tried to get me convinced that it was really the message that made people to convert to Christianity; it was “*nonkondo daKarunga* -- just the power of God.”<sup>294</sup>

When young Rebekka and her friends became teenagers, the missionaries wanted to keep the girls safe from “pagan” traditions and brought them to Rupara to be educated there. At the time, all girls in Kavango were expected to go through initiation rites, the so-called traditional wedding. Because of language problems and the male interpreter I could not get much information about these rites, although I would have been curious about them.<sup>295</sup> From other sources it is known that in Kavango the girl was secluded into a hut for a longer period of time starting from the first menstruation, went through cleansing ceremonies and was given to the fiancé soon after the rites were over.<sup>296</sup>

In Rupara, young Rebekka was taught by a Finnish missionary named Anna Rautaheimo,<sup>297</sup> who was concerned that Rebekka would become a “pagan” if she returned home. She was an intelligent girl, fast to learn new things, and eager to learn more. Rebekka was almost sent to a teacher seminary from the school. However, her mother together with her maternal aunt Maria Mwengere, the Shambyu *homp*a,<sup>298</sup> came to take her back home. Young Rebekka was angry about the interruption of her education, but she could not avoid attending initiation rites. She wanted to refuse the marriage, which was to follow, but finally she had to accept the man chosen by her parents. The man was a Catholic Christian involved in building the Shambyu mission station. Hence Rebekka Kambundu became a Catholic. After the death of her first husband *onane* Rebekka Kambundu got married again, and the couple moved to Rundu. She was then appointed as a headman.<sup>299</sup>

Mr **Stanislaus Semethe**, *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu’s interpreter, is the principal of Mayenzere Primary School. He is Catholic by denomination, but he is a former student of ELCIN Nkurenkuru High School. As he was aware of my interest in the traditional way of life in Kavango, he started his story:

“Unfortunately, when I grew up, my parents were already Christian. -- I did not

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<sup>294</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 28.7.2013, interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe.

<sup>295</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>296</sup> Fisch 2004, 193.

<sup>297</sup> Rautaheimo worked in Kavango 1931–1946. Ausiku 2011, 93.

<sup>298</sup> According to Fisch 2009, 60, 136, Maria Mwengere was the *homp*a of Shambyu from 1940 until 1987.

<sup>299</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013.

really [have a] chance of knowing the pagan way of living.”<sup>300</sup> He was baptised as a baby. He continued to tell about his childhood:

I [do] not really recall well, when I was a little boy or young. But the other basic things is for us to know how to wash your clothes, look after cattle, then help the parents at the field or -- catch the fish in the river. That is what I used to do as a young boy, because you are told. Not what you wish, but you are told to. --

We cannot sit just like that. It was to ABCD, so you must milk the cows so that your sisters can drink or eat it, also for yourself. Like me, I didn't... I don't [drink] milk, but my grandfather had to force me to know, how to milk.<sup>301</sup>

So the children used to have a lot of duties in the household and they had to obey what the elders demanded. Life was still quite traditional in comparison to the present time.

Because as -- we grew up, the Christianity was in our parents' part. They... educational understanding, it was not... it was little with them. To them is for the men to be -- men, he must have a lot of cows.<sup>302</sup>

On Sundays they went to church, and Christian faith became a natural part of life.

From the young age we were pulled to go to church with our parents every Sunday. After the time in the church then you are allowed to go and do other thing, but not any work. There is different, because we believe that Sunday is a day that we rest, don't do hard work. But of course you can fetch water or look after cattle, yeah, but not the main job. --

But it was good, because we kind of knew from early child[hood], as God is somebody there, who brought us on earth and -- his wish is for us to stay from evil, from hurting [each] other. So it kind of a way that really also help us -- because of that's somehow maybe through I am today. Most of time Christianity bring me up. It was good. And even now my little girl, even today she says, let's go to church, because she checks every Sunday, and it kind of helping me. I thank my parents for really pushing me in such a direction.<sup>303</sup>

I was interested to get more elderly people to be interviewed, because I thought that they would still have memories about the time before Christianity and could tell how the changes happened. So I interviewed **a great-grandmother**. Her first name Aune refers to the influence of the Finnish missionaries, although there has been no Aune working in the Kavango region.<sup>304</sup> The age of the great-grandmother is not known. The interpreter, her granddaughter, told me, “Maybe she is 90 or 80, 85...”<sup>305</sup>

This great-grandmother was born in Mupini. The family had moved across the border from Angola, because this made it easier for men to go to work in

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<sup>300</sup> Stanislaus Semethe's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>301</sup> Stanislaus Semethe's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>302</sup> Stanislaus Semethe's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>303</sup> Stanislaus Semethe's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>304</sup> List of the Finnish missionaries in Kavango in Ausiku 2011, 93–95. For comparison, *otate* Heikki Ausiku told in his interview 15.7.2013 that his name came from a Finnish missionary who was only shortly visiting Kavango.

<sup>305</sup> Great-grandmother's interview 29.7.2013, explained by her granddaughter.

mines in Johannesburg. It was the time of the Native Commissioner Harold Eedes.<sup>306</sup> According to the great-grandmother, there were only two houses then in Rundu, so her memory reaches the time when the government post was moved there in 1936. Mupini was a rural village with many more inhabitants.<sup>307</sup>

The family was Lutheran; the great-grandmother has been a Christian since her childhood. She referred to the Christian name of her mother, Karolina, and to that of her grandmother, Maria. So, the family had been Christian as far as she could remember. There was already a mission school in Mupini and the great-grandmother attended the school as a child. At school they were taught to read and write. They heard Bible stories and did some practical things like needlework. She used to sing in a church choir. The children also attended Sunday school, where they sang hymns and learned about God.<sup>308</sup>

After the primary education in Mupini it was possible for girls to attend a school in Nkurenkuru and for boys to attend one in Rupara. Some of this great-grandmother's friends did so, but she herself did not. Learning was difficult, but she was good at baking bread and cakes, so she started a business. She got a Christian husband, who was working for a Boer. It was now the time of the governor Morris,<sup>309</sup> and Rundu was developing quickly. Modern houses were being built, but the hospital was made of reeds.<sup>310</sup>

The great-grandmother had also seen development in the church. There were more people being baptised and confirmed. She could still remember the time when most people were traditionally clothed. Only those ones who were staying with the missionaries had modern clothes. The majority of the people used to have only a piece of cloth and skin, and another skin to carry the baby; so there was a clear distinction between Christians and non-Christians. At the time there were only two churches, the Catholic and the Lutheran. The great-grandmother had not heard of any conflict between the Lutheran and Catholic churches,<sup>311</sup> so

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<sup>306</sup> Harold Eedes was the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs posted by South African government in 1932 in Nkurenkuru and since 1936 to 1946 in Rundu. He got nickname *Nakare*, because he was so tall; in Rukwangali *re* means long. Fisch 2009, 36, 74.

<sup>307</sup> Great-grandmother's interview 29.7.2013.

<sup>308</sup> Great-grandmother's interview 29.7.2013. She also told that the wife and the sister of Bishop emeritus Sindano were singing in the same choir, and the bishop actually came from the same family as the great-grandmother's late husband.

<sup>309</sup> The Native Commissar Robert Frank Morris was called Morosi by the locals and his period in Rundu was from 1946 until 1954. Fisch 2009, 74. OR: until 1957. Fisch 2009, 96.

<sup>310</sup> Great-grandmother's interview 29.7.2013.

<sup>311</sup> The conflict clearly existed there; the two churches were competing for their position in Kavango. Otherwise both churches functioned in a very similar way. Kemppainen 1998, 150–159, 189–191.



she thought of both groups simply as Christians – others were “pagans” (*vapagani*).<sup>312</sup> The interview of this great-grandmother made me realise that Christianity in Kavango has even longer and deeper roots than I had expected.

**Nikolaus Katombera**’s interview was done much later than the others, and it happened at my home. Mr Katombera came to Finland for a semester as an exchange student. He is a mathematics and geography teacher, and was doing further studies in education. He is an albino, so I thought it would be interesting to hear his point of view, but as I interviewed him I realised he is the person that I had been looking for: someone who had converted to Christianity from traditional practices! My assumption had been that the older an informant is, the closer he is to traditional religion, but this was proved wrong: Mr Katombera was the second youngest of my informants!<sup>313</sup>

Mr Katombera described his life as “a sad one.”<sup>314</sup> His father left the family when the albino boy was born. He only met his father when he was already 16 or 17 years old. As a young boy, his task was to look after cattle and to plough the fields, which is typical in Kavango. The grandparents, with whom he actually lived, had not gone to school and did not know about Christianity, either. The family was of an Angolan background, which may have contributed to this. In any case they were poor, and making ends meet took all their energy. As for religion, Mr Katombera told that they did not really worship anything, but “they believed in some superstitions of healing.”<sup>315</sup>

Young Kambinda,<sup>316</sup> as Nikolaus was called at the time, found out that other children of his age went to school. He wanted to go there, too. He started going to school at about ten years of age against the will of his guardians. Later on he realised that the other children had Christian names, and learned that one gets such a name through baptism. He wanted to get a Christian name for himself and began to attend Catholic baptismal classes but got frustrated, because the classes just continued and continued, and it looked like the baptism was not going to happen. He then found a quicker way: he joined Lutheran baptismal classes and got baptised at the age of fourteen.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Great-grandmother’s interview 29.7.2013.

<sup>313</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>314</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>315</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015. More about Mr Katombera’s experiences related to traditional healing in chapter 4.3.

<sup>316</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s e-mail 18.7.2017.

<sup>317</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015.

Nikolaus, now with this name, was performing well at school, but it seemed he would have to drop out of school because of lack of money. Some people advised him, however, that at ELCIN Nkurenkuru High School it is possible to get Finnish sponsors to pay for the education. He was accepted to the school and studied well. Before finishing high school he finally succeeded in finding his father, and they were reconciled.<sup>318</sup>

Mr Katombera also found personal faith during his high school time.

And then, when I went to high school, thank God, it was a church school. Every Sunday we [had] to attend a church service. Every evening of day we [had] evening devotion before we go for dinner. So that with time made me realise the name that I fought for in the confirmation was not enough for what I need to be involved in Christianity. Then I came closer and closer.

So I joined SCM, that was Student Christian Movement -- where we attend Bible studies, we do gospels through singing, we travel to other congregations and to other schools just to socialise in terms of Christianity. -- Even when I got in grade 10, because of perhaps maybe my involvement -- I became the secretary for... for SCM and then the treasurer for church. -- And then when I went to grade 11, I was made the chairperson of SCM. -- Mostly SCM brought me closer to religion and Christianity involvement.<sup>319</sup>

The Christian school and the Christian student movement were decisive factors in his way to a deeper understanding of Christianity.

### **3.2. The Meaning of Christian Faith**

The findings of this study are mostly based on interviews of the informants, and we will now proceed to analyse what they have said. Chapters 3.2 and 3.3 analyse what they said about their Christian faith, and chapter 4 is a thematic presentation of how they now view traditional religion.

Christianity seems to be an integral part of life to people in Kavango, and personally important to all whom I interviewed. The study is skewed in that I precisely wanted to study the image of Christianity and the traces left by missionary work in Kavango, so I did not even look for any informant who would not be a Christian. However, it might have been difficult to even find a non-Christian to be interviewed.

Africans in general are truly religious, which has been confirmed by several anthropologists.<sup>320</sup> The spiritual world is real for an African. Although spirituality is substantially present in everyday life, the spiritual realm can be true to such an

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<sup>318</sup> Nikolaus Katombera's interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>319</sup> Nikolaus Katombera's interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>320</sup> A list of researchers of African religion could include for example the following names E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Mary Douglas, Geoffrey Parrinder, John S. Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, Placide Tempels to mention but a few.

extent that all the religious things are considered spiritual. For example, Mr Hamurenge's parents had understood Jerusalem as a heavenly city only.<sup>321</sup>

In search of the significance of Christianity to the Kavango people I was eager to find people who had converted to Christianity from traditional beliefs. I hoped to shed some light on the fundamental motives of embracing Christianity. However, even my oldest informants had been Christians since their childhood. Christianity is much more deeply rooted in the soil of Kavango than I first expected. The people can hardly describe Christianity in terms of religious conversion. Unlike in Europe, Christian faith belongs to peoples' daily life as an essential part. However, as one of my informants noted, its importance seems to be declining among the younger generation as the result of ongoing modernisation.<sup>322</sup>

During my stay in Kavango, the Angolan woman was the only person I met who had recently converted to Christianity. Unfortunately the interview with her was very much limited in depth due to the circumstances. But, as noted in the conversation with her, in Angola there are still many non-Christians. There the churches do not have enough workers, and traditional witchcraft still has a strong hold on the people. The Angolans make some offerings (*yizamberero*), of which I did not get any details, and they play drums (*nongoma*). As a Christian the woman was not eager to talk about the old ways. *Otate* Isak Veijo translated that she was just referring to "their things"<sup>323</sup> – they were not hers anymore! The woman herself simply wanted to honor (*fumadeka*) God in the church. She was happy to be a Christian.<sup>324</sup>

The earlier missionaries made a sharp distinction between what is Christian and what is "pagan." During decades of contacts with missionaries from various parts of the world I have often heard that first-generation Christians are often very strict in condemning the old that they have left behind. Perhaps the new converts themselves want to identify with their new faith by looking upon their past ways as the work of the devil. The truth is probably not so black-and-white: how could a new faith be embraced if the old would not provide any points of contact?

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<sup>321</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>322</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>323</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013, translated by Isak Veijo.

<sup>324</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013.

The very first answer to my enquiry about the reasons for being a Christian was the desire to get into heaven one day.<sup>325</sup> For Mr C “the question that traditional belief [has] failed to answer is where do we go after we die.”<sup>326</sup> Classical Christianity offers an apparent answer, heaven. I thought first that this kind of thinking could apply to all of my informants from Kavango. Their opinions, however, had clearly more variety. Most probably the strong emphasis on heaven and damnation reflects the Pentecostal type of belief this informant represents. Mr C actually argued in a much more detailed way:

I am a Christian because the following reasons:

- (a) I want to go to heaven one day and be with God for ever and ever
- (b) I have seen that being a Christian is the only way to escape God's judgement at the end.
- (c) to have a conscience free from condemnation of guilt [guilt] cause by sin(s)
- (d) to be able to pray to God freely.<sup>327</sup>

Being together with God forever, escaping his wrath, and having a clean conscience were not really mentioned by many other interviewees, whereas Mr C's fourth reason, the importance of prayer, was mentioned over and over again.

Although my experience of Namibia is thoroughly Christian – even the former president of Namibia on his meeting with diplomats first thanked us Finns for bringing the gospel to his nation!<sup>328</sup> – Mr C was critical: many people “do not want to become Christian -- because of the attraction of the world.”<sup>329</sup> Although Mr C's church comes from Nigeria, similar voices can also be heard in the Western world. Revivalist groups often divide people into “sheep and goats” and criticise established churches for being too liberal. Mr C was calling for true Christian commitment from his fellows.<sup>330</sup> Many other informants were not so strict in their faith, but they, too, claimed to be Christians. For example, Mr A said that baptism and confirmation make him a Christian.<sup>331</sup>

Christianity was explained in very classical ways. Mr A also expressed the contents of Christianity in terms of salvation: “There is this one path that is

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<sup>325</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008. Miettinen 2005, 28 has got similar answers, when he has interviewed pastors and teachers in Owamboland. He sums up the answers as “people converted because they wanted to gain eternal life.”

<sup>326</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>327</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>328</sup> This happened 5.4.2017 at the residence of the Ambassador of Namibia, when the former President Hifikepunye Pohamba was visiting Finland for a CMI conference. I was present to hear his speech.

<sup>329</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>330</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>331</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

through Jesus and then there's the Almighty. The only path for salvation."<sup>332</sup> For Mr B it was question of very practical things, getting the "daily bread."

Everything I do, I have to ask Jesus. Yes. Or God. -- Even the food is very important to give the thanks for God. Like this year the God she didn't give us more rain. Yes. That's why many people they are suffering. They got hungry. Yes. No food. The cattle it is died. Because of no food. Yes. -- If you... one year you see, here's a lot of rain, every people you see they are happy. Yes. They are happy. They look *mahangu* and maize meals they are planting. Is very good. And the animal also they look a lot of grass and is very well. They eat, they fed very good. That's why you have to say: Thank you, God! Yes. That's why we to believe to Jesus. Yes.<sup>333</sup>

Bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano defined being a Christian in the following way:

A Christian. We have just to see this word; Christian is from Christ, the follower of Christ. Then we can go to the name Christ. What [does] Christ mean? OK. This is a Greek word. But Messiah... Messiah is anointed, the one, who is anointed to do something, the king or something... Now Christian is anointed people by God himself. To do what? To do the mission of God. What is the mission of God? God created this world. And what? The purpose of God to create the world and put the people there... to harmonise the people and to keep the world in peace. In peace. Now when did this peace come again [as the people] failed? God decide to send his anointed Son to come as a missionary. And then, when his term of work finished, he [made] more people missionaries. -- And those missionaries are Christians. The aim is to change this world into a peaceful place that will please God himself. But doing what? Love God himself, who created man, and your fellow men as the greatest command. Love your God with your all mind and what... And your neighbor as yourself. That is a Christian.<sup>334</sup>

In short: Christians are followers of Christ, anointed by God to do his mission, which aims at love and peace towards God and between people.

A feature clearly present in African faith is belief in the devil. If something is not of God, it is of the devil.<sup>335</sup> Mr C described African thought: "Africa has -- complexity hidden in simplicity of always blaming either God or Devil for the happenings."<sup>336</sup> The idea is simple: whatever happens, in African thinking it is always caused by either God or the devil. Mr C added that "many still believe that satan is very stronger, and he can destroy [the] life of believers as well as unbelievers."<sup>337</sup> If I understood correctly, he meant that people have not really learned to trust God's power against evil. This is resonant of the traditional belief in various spirits or the presence of the spiritual world from which westerners are getting alienated. The traditional religion has also been very dichotomic about good and evil, and the people may feel themselves as pawns on a battlefield. Of course the devil is also found in the Bible. In comparison to postmodern, technical

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<sup>332</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>333</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>334</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>335</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>336</sup> Mr C's e-mail 28.5.2010.

<sup>337</sup> Mr C's e-mail 28.5.2010.

western society, many aspects of African spirituality seem to be much closer to the world of the Bible.

The devil belongs to hell. The ideas about heaven and hell seemed to be quite simple as the following discussion with the confirmation candidate shows:

- *What do you think about heaven? What it is? Am I making too difficult questions?*

No. Heaven is a place, where people like Christians go like... do everything like... is a place, where people have God, and people, who do and does the words of God and follow his commandments, go, when they die, then they live there.

- *So those people, who follow God's commandments, they go to heaven? But then, what if you don't follow?*

Then you go to hell. But before you go, if you ask for... if you confirm?

- *Confess your sins. [Helping with the language.]*

If you like confess your sins, before you die, then you still go to heaven.<sup>338</sup>

The one who follows God's commandments goes to heaven, and the one who does not goes to hell. By confessing sins, however, one gets into heaven. This may be the core of confirmation school teaching, because it was so self-evident for the confirmation candidate.

Understanding the Christian way of life seemed rather moralistic for many of my informants. For example, drinking alcohol or stealing is not suitable for a Christian.<sup>339</sup> Mr B simply commented with his limited English that "if you believe in Jesus, Jesus also she give you a good behavior."<sup>340</sup> Mr Hamurenge put it in more general terms: Christianity "gives rules that govern the life,"<sup>341</sup> it tells what is good and what is bad, it gives the order and moral.<sup>342</sup> Bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano also emphasised that a good moral, even nationwide, depends on Christianity, and was very much worried about deteriorating morals of his people as the church could not afford so many workers any more.<sup>343</sup> This ethical emphasis may stem from the tradition of past missionaries and local pastors to preach about sin. Miettinen enunciated the idea in Owamboland context: "If they had preached about a God who forgives sinners, the Ovambo Christians would have taken that as permission to commit sins."<sup>344</sup> He also noted that "it was not only missionary Lutheranism that was legalistic, but also the original Ovambo religion. It was important to keep the ancestral spirits satisfied in order not to face

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<sup>338</sup> Confirmation candidate's interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>339</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013; interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013; Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>340</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>341</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>342</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>343</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>344</sup> Miettinen 2005, 149.

difficulties.”<sup>345</sup> One could conclude that the old tradition of moralism has been somewhat carried forward.

Sundays are respected by Christians in Kavango. Mr Semethe was taught to go to the church on Sundays, and not to do any heavy jobs. “If there’s something that really made me not to go to church, -- I feel guilty,”<sup>346</sup> he admitted. I heard similar comments from some other friends with whom I did not make a research interview. According to Mr Semethe we should go to church to thank God for all his blessings and because there “we are getting information that is really needed in our soul, in our daily challenges, in many different spheres of life.”<sup>347</sup>

However, Christianity does not mean certain deeds or inactions, neither does it only mean going to church on Sunday. Christianity is for everyday life.<sup>348</sup> Bishop Sindano explained Christian ethics in the following way:

You see, the whole book of Leviticus, God give, how shall the people... should behave, and what the moral is, God wants them to do. But most of this is always coming to love. Love, love, love...<sup>349</sup>

He especially praised the diaconal ministry of the church in Finland: “At the same time is a deacon, at the same time a nurse, at the same is social worker. So to change and assists the person in a good way, that is Christianity.”<sup>350</sup> Anyway, the most important thing is love, not the rules how to live.

The role of Jesus seemed to be somewhat unclear or even missing in the answers of the commoners. Sometimes Jesus was mixed up with God the Creator: “Jesus they are the one give us the spirit to our mother and our father to born us, all of us.”<sup>351</sup> Sometimes Jesus was mixed up with the Holy Spirit: “It’s like the Holy Spirit... Jesus it’s... *Mpepo zaKarunga za zwida -- eguru* (God’s Spirit filling the heaven) -- which came, it was sent from heaven to save us -- from our sins.”<sup>352</sup> My aim was not to make a systematic study of the Christian doctrine adopted in Kavango, so I did not ask much about Jesus in general. Language problems contribute to a part of obscurity of the terms, but even then I have a vague feeling that Jesus is not very well known to a commoner in Kavango.

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<sup>345</sup> Miettinen 2005, 247.

<sup>346</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>347</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>348</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013; confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>349</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>350</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>351</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>352</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

“God save us from sins, from our sins... and problems. Because he always guide us, and he’s always around us,”<sup>353</sup> explained the confirmation candidate and continued, speaking directly about God:

People have a lot of problems, but... in God... put it in God’s hands now. Then in God’s hands it won’t be like... much for you. Because he always have solutions to every problem. -- When you have problems, you can communicate. -- God helps in any... he always help us. He cannot like stop helping us, because he is the one, who brought us here.<sup>354</sup>

It seems that it is easier to talk about God than about Jesus. God is understood as someone who can help in any problem, and his presence can be felt in prayer.

Jesus’ role as the Saviour is perhaps more difficult to grasp.

“Yeah, now Jesus is the only one, which is new to the African people,”<sup>355</sup> remarked Bishop Sindano. But he added that in northern Africa people were telling traditional stories “about the Son of God, who was killed by the whites.”<sup>356</sup> He meant that a character like Jesus was known even in some African pre-Christian tradition.

To find out more exactly what Jesus really means or does not mean for an ordinary Kavango Christian would require a new study. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku, however, had a strong opinion about what kind of Jesus must or must not be preached. The Europeans brought “a white Jesus -- just sitting there with long hair.”<sup>357</sup> Such a Jesus is needed instead, who understands the people and can also use their culture. Jesus must be there with blacks and whites and all others. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku stated that even the apostle Paul had not met the historical Jesus from Palestine, he had met the spiritual one. He did not, however, try to wipe out the historical basis of Christianity, because “then the Bible is no[t] important to us. -- We can appreciate that history that he was here for everybody.”<sup>358</sup>

Religion needs to be meaningful for people, otherwise they reject it. One meaning is the help people wish to gain from God in many spheres of life. Mr C expressed this in a straightforward manner: “As for me i believe in the true God for me to be successful in life, work, society and etc.”<sup>359</sup> It is tempting to compare this with traditional African religion: prayers were made to ancestors for exactly

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<sup>353</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>354</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>355</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>356</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>357</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>358</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>359</sup> Mr C’s e-mail 1.10.2008.



the same purpose, for the success of the person praying.<sup>360</sup> The need to ask help from higher powers seems to be deeply shared in humankind.

The importance of prayer was mentioned in almost every interview although I did not particularly ask about that. Thus, it can be concluded that prayer is a truly essential part of the faith of Kavango people. For example, Mr B described with his simple English:

If you be like -- to be angry, you have to sit to pray, yes, to pray to Jesus. Yes. You come to your brother is: Oh, my brother, you are angry. Yes, I'm angry. Yes. Let's sit. First I'm here to pray to Jesus. Yes. And you pray, you pray, you pray... And then you see your brother: Ah, my brother, I'm sorry. I'm understand, when you we pray here, understand. Now I'm give thanks to God. Yes.<sup>361</sup>

Prayer can even settle disputes between angry people.

There had obviously been talk about prayer at confirmation classes, too. The confirmation candidate explained that prayer is important at home in one's daily duties. One should also pray in the evening when going to sleep. For the confirmation candidate, prayer means communicating with God. She also noted, "It will also take time for you to receive the help that you want. So you have to [be] patient with God."<sup>362</sup> Prayers are not always immediately answered.

The Pentecostal type churches attract people with healing by prayer. The confirmation candidate even named the new churches as "those one[s] that are praying for disabled."<sup>363</sup> Attending prayer meetings, in some cases even at night,<sup>364</sup> and showing emotions in prayer is expected from members of these churches. Mr A described prayer as "communication between you and God,"<sup>365</sup> so that others cannot know better what and how one should pray.<sup>366</sup>

According to the bishop emeritus Sindano, Christianity has been a peace-keeping force between Namibians when the country became independent:

Now because of that even during the struggle, the people was very, very strong in Christianity and even in assisting each other. -- With the implementation of "435"<sup>367</sup> in Namibia not even a child was killed after the announcement of the result, not even a child is killed. And if you can see to another countries after election with the result, you see, what is a chaos. Now that was because of that influence of Christianity.<sup>368</sup>

Hence Christianity even has a profound societal meaning. The bishop was also happy to tell about an ecumenical service in Rundu in 2001, where leaders of

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<sup>360</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>361</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>362</sup> Confirmation candidate's interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>363</sup> Confirmation candidate's interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>364</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>365</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>366</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2017.

<sup>367</sup> This was the United Nations resolution to lead to the independence of Namibia.

<sup>368</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

churches in southern Africa and representatives of the World Council of Churches prayed together for peace in Angola. Within half a year there was peace after thirty years of civil war. Bishop Sindano believes in the power of prayer. But he gave an important advice:

But you see, when you pray, if you are praying for your own things, for your own benefit, is very difficult for God to answer. -- But when you are praying for things, which is attach many people, yeah, and you must pray also in unity, because we [are] all created by God himself, [then] God can answer easily.<sup>369</sup>

A prayer must not be selfish, but prayer is “very, very, very important!”<sup>370</sup>

### **3.3. Christianity – Foreign or African?**

Christianity “is meant for everyone,”<sup>371</sup> replied the confirmation candidate. The bishop emeritus reaffirmed, “According to the word of God, Christianity is for everybody.”<sup>372</sup> Otate Isak Veijo almost exclaimed, “Christianity should be for Christians! Whether they are in Africa, Asia, wherever.”<sup>373</sup>

When I asked the Angolan woman, whether she thinks that Christianity is a European religion, her answer was short and simple: “*Hawe!*” (No!) Then I tried to ask, if she thinks that Christianity is somehow related to the present development. The answer was again: “*Hawe!*” The development itself she saw as a good thing, “*nawa tupu*” (just fine), but for her, the building of roads and getting more education had nothing to do with Christianity.<sup>374</sup>

The young men with a university background saw it otherwise. “Christianity is more western than the African culture,”<sup>375</sup> said Mr Hamurenge. But this was not negative for him. According to him Christianity has, in a way, “taken religion on a higher level.”<sup>376</sup> Mr A had a clear opinion that “Christianity came to Africa, it was not originally here.”<sup>377</sup> I opposed by taking examples of Egypt and Ethiopia where Christianity spread already in its very beginning. As an educated person Mr A was, of course, able to grasp opposite views.<sup>378</sup> Naturally it remains a fact that Christianity was brought to Sub-Saharan Africa in a European form. However, my informants were not blaming Christianity for being Western

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<sup>369</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>370</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>371</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>372</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>373</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>374</sup> Interview of an Angolan woman 12.7.2013.

<sup>375</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>376</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>377</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>378</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

or strange for Africans. At least in Owamboland it is obvious that in peoples' minds there was a change from an alien into an African church in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>379</sup>

In bishop Sindano's opinion it was very good that the missionaries came from Europe and brought the message:

Originally that foundation was good. Because of that foundation you decide to come and do mission work in Africa, and as a fruit for mission work Namibia was influenced by especial. -- Those, who take Christianity first, were influencing the whole Namibia – except the Caprivians.<sup>380</sup>

The bishop also referred to the history:

Yeah, western, we are proud of them, because they manage to bring that Christianity into us. -- Christian is supposed to start in the northern part of Africa. But it was wept out by the Islamic. And then the European hold it, and then by holding it they bring it back to us. Yeah. Now we can judge ourselves. Those country, which is... have background of Christianity, they are very stable. Yeah. And if there is no Christianity, they are unstable.<sup>381</sup>

I consider this view much simplified. We can find contrary examples for example in Zimbabwe or South Sudan – or maybe the traditional African religions still have their strongholds there. But it is true that world religions have shaped culture and way of life in large areas.

*Otate* Heikki Ausiku had a clear opinion that Christianity fits anyone, whether African or European. However, he criticised the way how missionaries demanded native converts to leave all their “pagan” habits behind. The Africans should have been allowed to use their own music, for example – let the Europeans use theirs. As a result, for example, ELCIN has now two kinds of liturgies in use. In addition to the old liturgy inherited from the Finnish missionaries there is a newer African-style liturgy with which the people are getting acquainted.<sup>382</sup> The Africans like clapping their hands; they are born with the movement of their body.<sup>383</sup>

You are singing with your mouth, the tongue, the arms and hands. And also the legs that can move. -- Because you have to do something to be happy.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Miettinen 2005, 237–238, 245 reasoned this in the following ways: “The daily running of parishes had been handed over to Ovambo pastors, and there were more Ovambo evangelists and bush school teachers spreading the message.” At the same time there was almost a population explosion, resulting in more young people, who comprised the majority of the converts. Also, the revivals did not lead to secessionist African churches as easily happened elsewhere, because the Christians had taken the church as their own.

<sup>380</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>381</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>382</sup> Mission has been involved even in bringing the local music to the church. A long-standing Finnish missionary, musician Sakari Löytty has worked on finding indigenous music for liturgical use in ELCIN. His doctoral thesis (Löytty 2012) also tackled the issue.

<sup>383</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>384</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

He compared this to the Finnish church service, which is very serious, “very quiet like people are in the funeral.”<sup>385</sup> In Africa people dance even if they are going to see the president! *Otate* Heikki Ausiku grinned as a United Nations meeting in 1960s came to his mind: the westerners were worried about an Arab arriving in “a night robe!”<sup>386</sup> Not only missionaries can be blamed for demanding western way of life from others.

Nowadays missionaries pay regard to local cultures better than before. In older times the missionaries’ understanding of local traditions was more limited. Mr Hamurenge sympathised the old missionaries: they just “did not know why things were done”<sup>387</sup> when they labelled things as “paganism.” For example, they thought that women’s hair-dresses contained “cow dung” whereas in reality it was some kind of “powder.”<sup>388</sup> According to Mr Hamurenge it is “question of understanding.”<sup>389</sup> People are always suspicious of things that are new and unknown to them.

Former missionaries indeed understood the European way of life as Christian and demanded a similar way from the African converts. Transforming the culture was, however, not only bad. Mr A referred to the Kavango tradition of killing albinos:

And you cannot blame the Europeans. You cannot say, “No, they’ve cut our culture,” when we needed to destroy this albino. That was wrong! -- So it’s not that these missionaries just came and cut everything in culture. They were actually... they were open up, let’s say, for education.<sup>390</sup>

Many of the changes happened really for the best of the people.

The technical development that has come with the whites delights *otate* Isak Veijo, an engineer. He does not want to blame the missionaries for destroying the traditional culture of Africans. The modern world would exist regardless of how the Africans lived. It is better to share all that good. “There are many good things, and now we are living in a global village together.”<sup>391</sup>

We actually had a long discussion with *otate* Isak Veijo about the success of the mission. I tried to suggest that the missionaries attracted people by bringing modern development, but *otate* Isak Veijo opposed that idea very strongly.

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<sup>385</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>386</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>387</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>388</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>389</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>390</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>391</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

- *Why did people become convinced about Christianity? So, did they really believe the message? Was that the most important? Or were the people just thinking about hospitals and schools and such things that Christianity has brought along?*

No, it's not only schools. Especially schools started later on than that.

- *Yhm... But the first missionaries they brought education in this area.*

The first missionaries they preached.

- *Yeah, they did, they did. But they also taught people to read.*

But then...

- *Because they needed to start reading the Bible.*

Yes. Education. -- Literate education. Yes, they did.

But then of course the government prevented them to teach them beyond standard one or standard two, you know. They don't teach complex beyond that. And then the church did that, even the missionaries did that. The people, my teachers, who were teaching us, they didn't pass more than standard one. --

But the first thing is the preaching. The preaching. What they exactly say, I don't know, but I think that people were convinced that to be a Christian is to be... those who came in, who opted to be Christian -- they were convinced that to be a Christian is to become a better person.

- *OK. So it was not just that the missionaries were kind of misusing hospitals and schools to get people to them?*

Oh, no, no, no. I think hospitals and schools are things, which came late.

- *But anyway they have always been related to the missionary work.*

Yeah. They built some hospitals, they built some schools. -- Hospitals, for example... as we are still now talking about traditional healing, the people is not really convinced that the white healing system is better than the earlier. Yeah. So for that alone, I don't think it's a success.

- *OK. That's a good point.*

Yeah. But for education maybe yes. But education mainly in the words of God. Of course to read the Bible and to sing, they have to know how to read. So that's more or less literature... --

But I think the missionaries preached. The way they preached, how they preached, what they preached, I cannot say, but it managed to convince the people to become Christians.<sup>392</sup>

*Otate* Isak Veijo was thus truly convinced about the importance of preaching the gospel. That made people in Kavango convinced about Christianity. Neither schools nor hospitals nor technical development could have made it. The literature, at least that concerning Owamboland, contradicts this view. Already in 1934 missionary Erkki Lehto researched why people had converted, and according to his findings only 1 % had become Christians because of preaching. The biggest group in his classification was "for some material reason or out of vanity."<sup>393</sup> Even the first group of missionaries on Namibian soil was sceptic about the efficiency of preaching.<sup>394</sup> Here I could conclude that *otate* Isak Veijo's

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<sup>392</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>393</sup> Miettinen 2005, 219 (referring to archives of the Finnish mission).

<sup>394</sup> Peltola 1958, 57–58.

strong opinion reflects a logical reasoning, however, done in hindsight: because the work of the missionaries resulted in a Christian nation and the missionaries' primary task was to preach the gospel, the conversions must have happened through preaching. In reality, the matter may not have been so simple.

*Otate* Isak Veijo had experience of living abroad himself and thus he could see why the missionaries did not always understand local culture. Overcoming many problems, not even knowing the language to start with, the missionaries managed to bring the message. Nowadays many traditional cultural habits are coming back to the church, for example the drums, *nongoma*. Isak Veijo, however, added a word of caution: "We can use the rhythm, we can use the melodies, we can use this resource. But then we have to be careful to not just bring everything in and the ship will sink again."<sup>395</sup> Too much contextualising, for example talking about a black Jesus, will steal credibility from the Bible, turn it into a storybook. Facts are facts and cannot be changed. Jesus was living in Palestine, and was not born at the Nkurenkuru open market!<sup>396</sup>

At least the older generation could easily differentiate between the missionaries (*vatumwa*) and colonialists (*vakoloni*). For example in the interview of *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu, she says,

It's two ways. Those colonist, who came to colonise, passed their way colonising us to the people, who could not get educated, so that they could hold the country, to take ownership. But then there [is] this other group that gave Christianity or teaching, the words of God. And through the power of God... the power of God change the mindset of the colonisers to get more weaker, so that up to today the Christianity has gone up. Even though she did not read so many books, but she can catch... she can realise, that somehow that is the work of God, that made here some of these changes. --

No, they welcomed the message. It's just because those colonisers, they really wanted to us to kill one another. But now with the missionaries, they really brought this message that really transformed us.<sup>397</sup>

Taking land from the uneducated people was not acceptable. But the missionaries teaching God's word brought along valuable changes. "*Vatumwa kwa rugana nawa* (the missionaries did good work),"<sup>398</sup> praised *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu.

The Finns clearly have a good reputation in Namibia. "It was good, because they are the one promote us to behave,"<sup>399</sup> stated Mr B about Finnish missionaries. "The Finnish they come to promote us, to teach us. Yes. The

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<sup>395</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>396</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>397</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013 as interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe.

<sup>398</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013.

<sup>399</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

Germany they take it -- our property here, they took it.”<sup>400</sup> Mr B credited “the Finland people”<sup>401</sup> for even taking care of clothing. In his youth

they are the one always help us. That time we don’t have a lot of trousers and clothes, and that is the one help us. They sent here the trousers and clothes, yes, to help us.<sup>402</sup>

(According to my own memory sending second hand clothes from Finland to Africa had to be stopped because of increasing customs duties in 1990s.) A point to note here is that colonialism is often linked to Germans although their time in Namibia was short and a century ago. The remembrance of the Herero war, wiping out almost an entire nation, may have contributed to this. On the contrary, I have never heard much about the apartheid regime of South Africa in Kavango, although the struggle for independence against it was harsh. One obvious reason is that in the 1990s I was working with youth who had been just children during the apartheid era. Also, it is probable that in the countryside far from towns apartheid was not very visible in everyday life.

In short, the people in Kavango have adopted Christianity as their own religion. In any case, there have been major changes in the way of life due to Christianity. Next I am going to elaborate to more detail some of the points where the changes have been most visible in Kavango.

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<sup>400</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>401</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>402</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

## 4. Traditions in Relation to Christianity

### 4.1. Traditional Clothing and Hairdo

The early missionaries spent a lot of ink writing about traditional clothing and hairdo. My bachelor's thesis<sup>403</sup> was based on the writings of the first Finnish missionaries in Kavango published in the mission magazine *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*. The work led me to wonder why the early missionaries were so fixated on external matters, such as hairdo, clothing or drumming, instead of more spiritual questions, such as how the people think about spirits or how they worship. Most obviously, it is easiest to observe and pay attention to what is visible. However, the main concern of the missionaries was supposed to be spiritual, and that is perhaps one reason why they understood the strange way of clothing as a spiritual matter, being related to witchcraft. Dressed in "pagan clothes," then, one could not be baptised.<sup>404</sup>

When the first Finnish missionaries arrived in Nkurenkuru in the end of 1920s, the clothing style of the majority of the local people was still truly traditional. The men could wear only a belt and a small front apron to cover their genital area. The original material was animal skin; cotton cloth became more common as contacts with whites increased. The women had more material; their apron-like clothes looked more like a skirt. They also used necklaces and belts made of ostrich shell beads and spiral-like bracelets and bangles made of copper.<sup>405</sup>

European style clothing, however, was no longer completely unknown. Some men had already been in migrant work and brought along new things. Acquiring clothes has probably been a very alluring reason for young men to leave for contract work. There was also the South African government post in Nkurenkuru, and the Portuguese military post of Cuangar on the other side of the river, and the people working there were clothed accordingly.<sup>406</sup> It seems, however, that for the wider population, Christian mission has been the agent of transformation.

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<sup>403</sup> Muurman 2011.

<sup>404</sup> LS 1930, 33: *Pastori Järvisen kirjelmä Lähetysseuran toveripäiville*.

<sup>405</sup> For example, Okavango 1958, 57–58.

<sup>406</sup> The clothing, both old and new, can be seen in photos from the first decades of the twentieth century. For example, Eckl 2004, 43, 65, 74, 125, 160 shows some examples of men's western style clothing before the missionaries came.



Traditionally, women had their bodies smeared with an ointment called *rukura*. *Usivi* wood<sup>407</sup> was first chopped into small pieces and further pounded to make a soft powder. The powder was then mixed with milk fat, and so the ointment was ready to be used.<sup>408</sup> *Rukura* was never washed off the skin, even if the women went to catch fish in the river. When *rukura* was eventually worn off, more was smeared.<sup>409</sup> *Rukura* was used by women for the purpose of beautification. Another effect of *rukura* was to protect the skin from heavy sunshine and even from feeling cold in the winter.<sup>410</sup> Men did not use *rukura* themselves, but could get some of it on their skin from their wives as they slept on the same blanket, which was never washed either.<sup>411</sup> *Rukura* used to be very valuable, to the extent that cattle had to be paid for spilling it.<sup>412</sup>

Women's hairdo was made of plant fibre (sisal fibre<sup>413</sup> or *mugoro* tree roots<sup>414</sup>). It was first softened by water and hammering,<sup>415</sup> and then plaited to their own hair. The fastening on the head was done using "a doughy layer"<sup>416</sup> called *munde*, which consisted of grass, *muparara* tree powder and fat.<sup>417</sup> The missionaries' common assumption was that it was cow dung.<sup>418</sup> The plaits were decorated with beads (*yiranda*) and cowry shells. The men could acquire decorations for their women when they went to work in the towns.<sup>419</sup> The cowry shells especially were very popular and also expensive. Their origin is in the Indian Ocean, particularly around the Maldives, so indirect trading networks over very long distances have somehow existed already in the pre-colonial era.<sup>420</sup> The

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<sup>407</sup> Mr C's e-mail 6.6.2011. *Usivi* is translated as African red seed tree in the Rukwangali dictionary. Ausiku 2007, 264. For comparison, the Himba recipe for *rukura* is told to be "mixing animal fat, ash and ground ochre." BBC about Himba People 2017.

<sup>408</sup> Fisch 1980, 10.

<sup>409</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013. Perhaps this tradition still continues to the present way of young girls' abundant use of skin lotions, which I have observed in Kavango.

<sup>410</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>411</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013.

<sup>412</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013. He told a story about his grandmother spilling *rukura* by accident.

<sup>413</sup> Scherz et al 1999, p. 21; recordings made at Mbunza Living Museum 25.7.2013.

<sup>414</sup> Scherz et al 1999, p. 22; Mr C's e-mail 6.6.2011. *Mugoro* is translated as yellowbush. Ausiku 2007, 117.

<sup>415</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013; recordings made at Mbunza Living Museum 25.7.2013. Scherz et al 1999, p.21.

<sup>417</sup> Scherz et al 1999, p.21. *Muparara* equals to African wattle. Ausiku 2007, 129.

<sup>418</sup> For example, Sieviläinen 1998, 11 presents a photo with a legend "A Kwangali girl in a traditional dress with cow dung in her hair."

<sup>419</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013; Scherz et al 1999, p.21.

<sup>420</sup> Curtin et al 1995, 157, 220.

most valuable decorations expressed the wealth of their owners, and could be even confiscated by the royals.<sup>421</sup>



A Kwangali bride. Photo by Paavo Korhonen in the 1950s or 1960s.

I was able to show this photo of a Kwangali bride to some of my informants. “Beautiful!”<sup>422</sup> exclaimed Mr A when seeing it. The missionaries, however, condemned this kind of appearance as “pagan,” unfitting for a Christian. Mr A commented that converts had to sacrifice their old customs:

There are types of sacrifice. -- Many people believe in white men is more intelligent than they. -- So many think, that the white person tells you, you must believe.<sup>423</sup>

One style of decoration was the shaping of teeth done with an axe. Mr Hamurenge told that his grandmother had undergone this mutilation, which was very painful. This was done for beauty, but somehow the procedure also “imitated animals, how you are able to carry the pain.”<sup>424</sup> One further custom was scars on the cheeks, which were inflicted to alleviate eye issues and headaches – and according to Mr Hamurenge “it actually helped.”<sup>425</sup> Additionally, amulets were used for protection from evil spirits.<sup>426</sup>

The missionaries understood all this as heathen ways. They demanded that whoever wants to be a Christian must abandon the old style and dress like a civilised person. The Catholics explained the hair-cut as a symbolic breaking away from the previous traditions.<sup>427</sup> Otate Heikki Ausiku remembered that his grandmother and aunt “refused to be baptised because of their hair.”<sup>428</sup> This kind

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<sup>421</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>422</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>423</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>424</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>425</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>426</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>427</sup> Fisch 2009, 59.

<sup>428</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

of refusal seems to have been typical in Kavango. An example of the missionaries' attitude is given in the following excerpt from the mission magazine *Suomen Lähetysseuran*:

Also many wives would like to become Christians, but as they need to give up their pagan hair it is an insurmountable thing for many of them. And with the pagan hair we cannot baptise anybody into communion with the Lord, because the hair includes not only an infinite amount of parasites and dirt, but also magic.<sup>429</sup>

One can argue about the "magic," but it is obvious that "parasites and dirt" have been a real problem. The Finnish missionaries have written several narratives about "tiny cattle" running in the hair;<sup>430</sup> the German accounts agree by mentioning "teeming louses"<sup>431</sup> similarly.

The teaching of missionaries was considered excellent by *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu. People learned to wash themselves and stay clean. For her it was not a question about witchcraft or something "pagan" but simply hygiene and health. Although the people lived next to the river and commonly did chores related to water,<sup>432</sup> they never washed themselves. Thus the missionaries really helped the people by teaching cleanliness and proper clothing.<sup>433</sup>

Bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano was involved in the clothing business since his childhood. His uncle was selling second hand clothes first in Angola, later in South West Africa; in the 1950s their trading routes reached to present-day Zambia and Congo. Yet, in the childhood of Bishop Sindano most people still dressed traditionally, and he understood it as "normal,"<sup>434</sup> the people were used to it. For him, following the traditions also meant respecting elders.<sup>435</sup>

In general, the opinion was like engineer Isak Veijo's: In the beginning "we didn't have the machinery to weave the material," but even then "the people were trying to cover themselves with skins."<sup>436</sup> He could not blame missionaries for having destroyed the culture. The western development would exist, whether the

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<sup>429</sup> LS 1930, 33: *Pastori Järvisen kirjelmä Lähetysseuran toveripäiville.* "Kyllähän monet vaimotkin haluaisivat kristityiksi, mutta kun on luovuttava pakanatukasta, niin se on usealle ylivoimainen asia. Ja pakanatukan kanssa emme ketään voi kastaa Herran yhteyteen, kun siihen tukkaan sisältyy ei ainoastaan ääretön määrä syöpäläisiä ja likaa, vaan myös taikuutta."

<sup>430</sup> For example, LS 1938, 77 mentioned "*tekotukan pikkukarjoiheen*" (artificial hair with its tiny cattle) and Jantunen 1958, 65 wrote about "*pitkä pakanaperuukki, oikea eläintarha*" (a long pagan wig, a real zoo).

<sup>431</sup> Eckl 2004, 378 referring to Wüst 1934, 21. *Auf diesem, oftmals von Läusen wimmelnden Haarwust schmieren sie massenhaft meistens ranziges Fett hinein.* (On this hair jumble, often teeming with louses, they smear masses of fat, which is more often than not rancid.)

<sup>432</sup> Kavango River was a real lifeline of the area. The people went to the river to take water for cooking, to catch fish, and to travel by canoes, among others.

<sup>433</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013.

<sup>434</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>435</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>436</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

missionaries brought it or not. “The aircraft would still be overflying even we were having skins on us.”<sup>437</sup>

A slightly more critical voice was heard from *otate* Heikki Ausiku. He reminded that if people did not dress properly, “that had to do with poverty, not really the culture.”<sup>438</sup> Those living in remote areas did not have access to western style clothes. He pointed out that people in traditional dress were not naked,<sup>439</sup> although that is how the missionaries saw it. As the women’s breasts and men’s buttocks could be visible, that was nakedness to the Finns who wore long sleeves and hems even in the African heat.

Although missionaries were appalled by the “nakedness,” the people did not consider themselves at all naked. Mr Hamurenge admitted that the traditional way of dressing also included a sexual meaning as the girls were “showing the breasts to men.”<sup>440</sup> But the biggest meaning of the dressing code was in showing one’s position in the society.<sup>441</sup> The ostrich shell necklaces were worn mostly as status symbols, owing to their rarity. Thus the man showed that he had been able to bring these valuable gifts, in a similar way as someone nowadays buys a diamond ring. The more beautiful objects a man could afford, the more powerful he was. It was a “very much unequal society: the position needed to be known, the classes were there.”<sup>442</sup>

The older informants could still remember the traditional clothing style, the younger ones only referred to “dancing traditional.”<sup>443</sup> The dancing groups seem to be popular in present-day Kavango. Their clothing is not truly traditional, however, merely imitating the traditional style. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku laughingly remarked that the old hair style is now coming back. He also wondered why missionaries did not demand hair cut from the European women as well. According to him, the hair had to be bald cut for baptism in any case whether it was one’s own natural hair or the traditional style hairdo. However, almost bald

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<sup>437</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>438</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>439</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>440</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>441</sup> This keeps with Shidwedha’s argument about Owamboland: “The pre-colonial period costumes were important symbols that identified socio-cultural position, status and relationships between individuals and people in the various Oshiwambo-speaking communities.” Shigwedha 2006, 119.

<sup>442</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>443</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013; confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

shaved hair is again demanded from high school girls in Namibia. It is probably thought to help them focus on their studies rather than think about their beauty.<sup>444</sup>

The informants confirmed that the biggest change in clothing style happened “when the missionaries came.”<sup>445</sup> It was usually the people living next to the missionaries or at mission stations that first changed to modern clothing.

That time those people were wearing clothes, those, who are Christian. And those one, who were wearing, if they are going to church, they were wearing clothes they get from the missionary. And those one who did not believe now in Christian now, was still wearing those clothes of them skins. --

People wearing clothes only those one, who were staying at the missionary. And at home it's only with cover yourself with a piece of cloth and skin and skin and a skin again to carry a baby. And here you are just... -- The breast are out.<sup>446</sup>



People in front of Nkurenkuru church, perhaps in 1950s. The Christians had “chaste” clothes, the others were dressed traditionally. Photo by Tuulikki Jantunen.

Cultural transformation was naturally a slow process that took time, so it cannot be dated exactly. The biggest change in clothing culture happened in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1950s the number of baptisms was rapidly increasing and that brought people to chaste clothing.<sup>447</sup> According to missionary tradition, in the 1960s even non-Christians were removing traditional hairdos. Modern style had become so common and widely accepted, and it was more convenient as well. The

<sup>444</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>445</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013, wording by interpreter Stanislaus Semethe.

<sup>446</sup> The interview of the great-grandmother 29.7.2013, interpreted by her granddaughter.

<sup>447</sup> Lemström 1999, 32; Fisch 2009, 56.

traditional hair had surely been itchy, and the western style clothing also gives more shelter against the burning sun or cold winter nights.<sup>448</sup>

Although past missionaries have been criticised of strictly demanding a modern clothing style, none of the informants wanted the old style back. It is a question of health and hygiene. The Himba in Kaokoland (in north-western Namibia) still live according to their ancient traditions, but *otate* Heikki Ausiku confessed: “I cannot go close to them, because of [the] ochre smell.”<sup>449</sup> The modern world has come to Kavango, and there is no way back. One cannot deal with books and papers, let alone a touch screen, if the body is smeared with *rukura*.

Regarding the missionaries’ ideas about witchcraft being related to the traditional hairdo and clothing style, Mr Hamurenge offered the best explanation. According to him, the visible decorations could not contain any witchcraft, because “witchcraft was not shown to the public.”<sup>450</sup> He added, though, that “even in the tradition, when people didn’t understand something, it was just witchcraft [which was] the easiest form of explanation.”<sup>451</sup> Hence he was also able to understand how easily the old time missionaries misunderstood things strange to them and blamed them for magic.<sup>452</sup>

## 4.2. Questions Concerning Marriage

Marriage is not something especially Christian. Marriage as an institution can be found in different cultures all over the world, also in Africa.

Marriage has been traditional. It has been there. And it was even before the missionaries came. People were married.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> I have learnt the approximate timing of the change by discussing with elderly, retired Finnish missionaries. For comparison, Mr B was born around 1970, and in his childhood the western clothing had already replaced the traditional style in Kavango. Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013. According to Shigwedha 2006, 224 the change from traditional to modern clothing happened in Owamboland mostly in the 1950s.

<sup>449</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>450</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013. – The idea of witchcraft in the decorations is, however, present in Förg’s presentation of traditional funeral customs of the Mbunza. According to him almost every piece of jewellery stood for the magic powers of the person carrying it, and therefore they were taken away from the dead person before putting him or her into the grave. Otherwise he or she could come to demand taking removal of jewellery in a dream at the family members, and that would predict unluck. “*Da fast jeder Schmuck in enger Beziehung zu der magischen Kraft einer Person stand, nahm man diesen verstorbenen Männern weg. Es herrschte die Ansicht, daß sonst die Tote den Familienangehörigen im Traume erscheine und diese bitte, den Schmuck abzunehmen, was Unglück bedeuten würde.*” Förg was a Catholic Father, but he wrote his description to a scientific journal. Förg 1968, 62.

<sup>451</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>452</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>453</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

Traditional marriage among the Kavango peoples was often polygamous. If the women were prevented from becoming Christians by keeping their hairdo, the problem of the men was having more than one wife. An example is described in Aatu Järvinen's letter:

At the back seat of the church there was sitting an old man, who was the most understanding and civilized whom I have met here. He has encouraged others to go to school and was eagerly talking about God's kingdom, but he has not been able to enter the Lord's congregation himself. – Among other matters, he has not been able to get rid of his second wife. He was asking which one he should send away. I was not able to solve the problem, so both wives have already sown their fields, and they must also get their crops.<sup>454</sup>

Missionaries in the past fought heavily against polygamy. In case a Christian man took a second wife, he was excommunicated, and bells were tolled as if he had died.<sup>455</sup> In the beginning of the Christian church in Kavango there were several cases where men turned to polygamy after having been baptised<sup>456</sup> – or did not reveal to the missionaries that they had more than one wife at the time of baptism. As an extreme example Ruben Makaranga, the first elder of the Nkurenkuru congregation, had finally more than ten wives.<sup>457</sup>

Polygamy was clearly much more common than I had understood earlier. When doing the interviews I continuously came across cases of polygamy. For example, Mr Hamurenge's grandmother got baptised after her polygamous husband died.<sup>458</sup> I was surprised to hear from some of my informants that their fathers had had two wives.<sup>459</sup> Sometimes it was difficult to have "motherly respect"<sup>460</sup> towards the extra wife of one's father.

I was calling her concubine, cause... -- my father and my mom were married in church. -- And later this one came... So, I know that my father is married to my mom, that this extra one is a concubine. So... but I couldn't be harsh. That is his will and he is allowed, so let it be.<sup>461</sup>

So the parents must be respected although one does not feel that they are doing what is right. The relationship between the wives varied. "Some used to fight,

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<sup>454</sup> LS 1931, 104–105: *Valon ja pimeyden taistelua.* "Kirkon peräpenkillä istui vanhus, joka on ymmärtäväisin, sivistynein, mitä täällä olen tavannut. Hän oli muita kehoittanut kouluun ja innokkaasti puhunut heille Jumalan valtakunnasta, mutta itse hän ei vielä toisten kanssa saanut astua Herran seurakuntaan. -- Hän ei vielä ole m.m. päässyt irti toisesta vaimostaan. Hän kyseli minulta kumman lähettäisi pois. Minä en sitä asiaa voinut ratkaista, ja niin ehtivät molemmat vaimot kylvää peltonsa, joten heidän on saatava satokin."

<sup>455</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013; Miettinen 2005, 144. – A dramatic description of the death bells is found in Okavango 1958, 114.

<sup>456</sup> According to Eckl 2004, 383 this shows that other dimensions except the religious contents had been there even initially to draw these people to Christianity.

<sup>457</sup> Milk 2004, 150.

<sup>458</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>459</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013; Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>460</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>461</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

quarrel of something... -- But some were very close like sisters,” explained *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu.<sup>462</sup>

Some people is having three wife.

- *Is it? Even nowadays?*

Yes. Even now.<sup>463</sup>

As this small excerpt of a discussion shows, polygamy is still present in Kavango, but it is not accepted in the church. Nowadays the people are not really excommunicated, but they are suspended from spiritual services. Bishop Sindano explained the policy of the church:

Still we are... still sticking on that matter, you have to leave the others, just keep one. But you have to care your children, because the children are yours.<sup>464</sup>

A Christian man should not take any extra wives, but similarly a polygamous man joining the church is required to keep only one wife. Bishop Sindano explained this policy:

Because if we can allow some, because they have already wives, they... people are very clever, they will stay from the church marrying many, many wives and then coming to the church. Because I came to the church, already I have my wives. Therefore we say “no.” Leave all those wives, just have one. And it is healthy thinking.<sup>465</sup>

*Otate* Isak Veijo followed the same line. He argued this through Jesus’ word about becoming one flesh: “It’s not three persons, not four persons to become one.”<sup>466</sup>

Bishop Sindano surprised me with a comment on how clever Europeans had been to find a solution when females in a community outnumber males.

You decide to educate women to become nurses, social workers and deacons, so that they can put more to save the people. -- And then if they are women, but they have good jobs, it will keep them busy instead of fighting for one husband and so on.<sup>467</sup>

The Roman Catholic solution was to have more nuns. But the Africans, unfortunately, did not have any plan for more females, so then they drifted into polygamy, told Bishop Sindano.<sup>468</sup> An excess of women being a problem would not have occurred to my mind, but obviously it has indeed been a true problem in Africa, because men used to participate in wars and hunting expeditions, and a single woman was an incomprehensible idea in the traditional society.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 28.7.2013, wording by interpreter Stanislaus Semethe.

<sup>463</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>464</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>465</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>466</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>467</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>468</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>469</sup> Fisch 2009, 15; Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013. Catholic Fisch expressed as her opinion that the absolute requisite of abandoning polygamy in order to become a Christian was a mistake by the mission. Especially after wars there had been an excess of women, and they had to



One reason for polygamy was getting more children, which guaranteed more workforce for the household. It also showed the prestige of a man, if he could control many women and have them live in peace.<sup>470</sup> However, it was only the rich who could take more wives. It was also possible to take a second wife, if the first one became “difficult.”<sup>471</sup> Another reason for polygamy was levirate, a relative marrying a widowed spouse, as a woman could not live alone.<sup>472</sup>

For the young generation there are several factors hindering the tradition of polygamy, not only Christian or western values but also other matters such as HIV.<sup>473</sup> Some of my informants said that Namibian law allows having several wives.<sup>474</sup> To be exact, only monogamous marriage is possible under civil law, but the state also recognises customary marriage.<sup>475</sup>

Sending away extra wives, as the church requires, has not been easy. It is a question of their home and place in society. When the bride price has been paid, how to reverse that? Where to put the children?<sup>476</sup> In practice, the children have followed their mother, and at least in the modern time it has been common for the grandparents to take care of children in case the mother is not able to do it herself.

In order to teach Christian ethics the missionaries have demanded blameless life from local Christians. In the 1930s missionary Aatu Järvinen admitted that if he would have made similar demands in Finland, he would have lost his job as a pastor.<sup>477</sup> However, strict morals inherited from the Finns to the church still go on in Namibia, not only concerning polygamy but also premarital sex.

Only recently ELCIN has begun to baptise children whose parents are not married.<sup>478</sup> Chastity is required, and it seems to be a sore spot to young people that they are not admitted to Holy Communion if they cohabit or get children outside marriage.<sup>479</sup> “They doesn’t get you a word. They just look as someone,

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be accommodated to the society in a way appropriate to the local society and culture. Also Mr Hamurenge confirmed the same reason in his interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>470</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013. Also Miettinen 2005, 257–260 described the economic benefits and social status increased by polygamy.

<sup>471</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 28.7.2013.

<sup>472</sup> Eckl 2004, 369.

<sup>473</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013. Opposing voices are also heard: in Facebook some young men have been demanding the old polygamy back. In their opinion it would only confirm the existing practice. Although they refer to their traditions, it sounds as they just selfishly want to have more women.

<sup>474</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013; Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>475</sup> Anyolo 2008.

<sup>476</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>477</sup> LS 1937, 45: *Lähetysaarnajan näkemyksiä työmaalla*.

<sup>478</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>479</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013; Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

who has sin on the way,”<sup>480</sup> told Mr Semethe. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku pointed out, however, that matters can be settled after the unmarried parents have confessed. There is a “school [of] confession” including pastor’s instruction and confession in front of the congregation.<sup>481</sup> My informants were surprised to hear that in Finland the church is much more liberal nowadays. “But you are the people who start... who brought church!”<sup>482</sup>

Earlier there was also a different kind of Christian wedding for couples where the woman was pregnant before marriage. They “should not be ceremonated in the church,”<sup>483</sup> but had their official proceedings silently in the church office. Such differentiation is no longer made.<sup>484</sup> Finding the right balance, however, is difficult: “That is the problem, because you become a bit soft, then people wants to do their own things. But to become too strict, then the people scare away.”<sup>485</sup>

For me it was feeling rather incongruous that young informants were struggling with their relationships as kind of drop-outs from the church and yet they did not plan getting married sooner. Mr Semethe was truly worried: “Like now... what will happen now, if I die tomorrow? It was not my wish to die without being officially married.”<sup>486</sup> (He has gotten officially married after the interview, however.) Mr A explained that before getting married there is the need of “growing up, getting to know each other well.”<sup>487</sup>

A serious reason seemed to be money for the wedding celebration. “I need money to get married, because all my family must come and all my wife’s family must come,”<sup>488</sup> explained Mr Semethe. I tried to suggest a more modest type of wedding that would not cost too much, but

the problem is like the mothers. They want to feel proud. They want to show the others that my daughter got married.<sup>489</sup>

This is not to blame anyone, but the ideal of the church does not always meet everyday praxis. There is an obvious need for less extravagant ways of getting

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<sup>480</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>481</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>482</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>483</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>484</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>485</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>486</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>487</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>488</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013. He continued about the need of money: “Meat is not a problem, but other refreshment, and venue. -- And you have to transport people from the village to town and back, and pay the people, who are going to cook.”

<sup>489</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

married, not only because weddings have become too expensive for many, and marriages are delayed, but the costly festivities also have their reverse side.

And the problem like in Africa is: most people they just want to get married, because they want to show off. After three months or two months the people are no more together.<sup>490</sup>

The problem of short marriages is also known in Europe, but for different reasons.

In the past, when a man wanted to get married, his family looked for a suitable girl, and then a maternal uncle, on behalf of the young man, went to ask for the girl. The family had to think about several aspects like fitting clan and good behaviour. Some families were out of question, because they might have had witches among them. There were altogether three negotiations, and in the first meeting the parents of the girl only listened silently without saying anything.<sup>491</sup>

The informants had contradicting views as to whether a price was paid for a bride. Mr Hamurenge said that the man had to pay a lobola up to ten oxen for getting a wife. The number depended on many things like the bride's age, how hard-working she was, whether she had already been pregnant or how respectable her family was.<sup>492</sup> According to *otate* Heikki Ausiku, however, there was no payment of oxen. It was possible to have a visible sign for the engagement, a thick and heavy copper ring in the ankle of the girl, but it was very expensive and thus used only by wealthy people.<sup>493</sup> I assume that the contradiction between no ox and even ten oxen as a bridewealth can be explained by the oxen being a relatively new tradition. For example, at the Mbunza Living Museum they presented a traditional wedding ox that was a small clay figure only.<sup>494</sup> Obviously the use of oxen has been expanding from a symbolic figure to a real ox, and later the amount of oxen added. Unfortunately I am not able to date the change.

There was no official marriage ceremony in the past, if the maturity festival is not counted. The actual marriage just happened in secret.

She's already proposed by somebody. And then, when time comes, you would no... you never know, when the man will come in that certain evening. The man will come in the girl's room. -- Is grown up and he has come now to his wife. That is sometime, is a secret.<sup>495</sup>

So the man just came to the girl's room and stayed overnight there, and then they were a couple. But prior to that there were the negotiations and possible gifts.

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<sup>490</sup> Stanislaus Semethe's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>491</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>492</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>493</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>494</sup> Recordings made at Mbunza Living Museum 25.7.2013.

<sup>495</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

The missionaries as well as colonial administrators have reported several cases where they assumed that old men were taking small girls as their wives or at least had sex with them. The terms “child wives,” “child marriages,” “marrying off little girls” and even “child prostitution” are found in the literary accounts.<sup>496</sup> *Foromani* Rebekka Kambundu strictly denied this. Instead, binding agreements about future couples were done by the parents, even before the baby was born. A special creamy ointment was used and smeared on the pregnant mother’s belly. That meant that the baby to be born would be the spouse of the child of the smearer.<sup>497</sup>

If it’s a girl, then my son will marry that girl, but if it’s a boy, then your boy will marry my daughter. But now it was strictly that they raise the kid, like my wife and me, we bring food, we bring anything given then the who to bring the cream, just for her to raise up my child. But they make sure that that girl cannot go with other men. The men can go to Siwanda [Grootfontein] to look for job, he knows I’m having a wife there. And the girl, they make sure that they raise her up until she has reached the puberty and then they used to... to get married.<sup>498</sup>

The agreement was binding, and falling in love with somebody else was simply impossible. But it was just an agreement; no sex was made with an underage child. However, the man may have visited his future wife to play with her, when she was still a child. That may have given the wrong impression to the missionaries. According to *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu the men never slept with underage children. The factual age of the girls getting married could not be given, but it was anyway soon after reaching the puberty.<sup>499</sup>

Although the missionaries were worried about the chastity of the people, my informants insisted that traditional morals used to be strict. People obeyed their parents and various taboos. Now a “sixteen-year-old woman without a baby is lucky,” whereas in the traditions “sex before marriage was not allowed,”<sup>500</sup> told Mr Hamurenge. The punishments could be harsh in the past. *Foromani* Rebekka Kambundu told as an example that if a man was found to have made a girl pregnant before her initiation rites, he was kept under a dugout canoe (*wato*) that was upside down on the ground until his family paid a compensation of cattle. The fear of the punishment efficiently kept the people from doing illicit things.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> For example, LS 1938, 117: *Okawango-lähetyksemme vaiheista* (“lapsivaimot”); LS 1931, 333: *Lupalan tietöja* (“lapsiavioliittoja”); LS 1931, 40: *Ihmiskauppaa* (“pikkutyttöjen naittaminen”); Eckl 2004, 368 and Fisch 2004, 193–199 (“Kinderprostitution”).

<sup>497</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>498</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013, wording by the interpreter Stanislaus Semethe.

<sup>499</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>500</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>501</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013.

Nowadays teenage pregnancies are common. In Mr Hamurenge's opinion, poverty also drives girls to have sex with older men, but the traditional way of life was not in balance either. He affirmed that people used to give young girls off, and the negotiations by parents could take place even before birth. At some point the girl was taken to the man's house, but did not sleep with him until her "coming of age."<sup>502</sup> So the marriage was strictly the parents' decision, and "full-aged" teenagers were still very young to take wives' responsibilities.

The initiation rite *etembu* or *rufuko* indicated a girl's readiness to marriage.<sup>503</sup> The aunts and grandmothers were teaching "how to be with your husband, how to take care of your kids, where is your place in society."<sup>504</sup> The missionaries misunderstood this as being merely sexual. "Also the sex education was there, [but the rite was] just the way of preparing the young people to adulthood."<sup>505</sup> The girls needed instruction, because "when you get married, the man takes you to another family; you are not supposed to make mistakes."<sup>506</sup> The boys were correspondingly taught by uncles and grandfathers. "To prove bravery you needed to go hunting and kill something [which shows that] you are able to defend and provide for your family."<sup>507</sup> The boys also needed to learn how to build huts and raise cattle.<sup>508</sup>

My information about the rite is very limited. The girl attending *etembu* was, after her first menstruation, secluded in a hut for about a month,<sup>509</sup> and this is when the instruction took place. In the end the girl was taken to the river to be cleansed. Finally she was declared as a woman, ready for marriage.<sup>510</sup> In my understanding the seclusion and instruction were done individually for each girl, whereas the cleansing took place collectively for a group of girls. (The timing remains unclear to me: was there possibly a waiting time between the first menstruation and seclusion or between the seclusion and cleansing?) The initiation included both the "time of hiding [and the] time of being revered,"<sup>511</sup> expressed *otate* Heikki Ausiku. In my understanding, the "traditional wedding" *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu had to participate is the same rite. Missionaries

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<sup>502</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>503</sup> Both rites are mentioned in McGurk & Gibson 1981, 55.

<sup>504</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>505</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>506</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>507</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>508</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>509</sup> Kampungu 1965, 316, 332; McGurk & Gibson 1981, 55.

<sup>510</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>511</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

wanted to protect her from getting into it. However, I could not get details from her because of the male interpreter.<sup>512</sup>

From Owamboland there are several missionary accounts bemoaning the corresponding ritual called *ohango*. According to the rules set by the mission, participating in *ohango* led to excommunication from the Christian congregation. From the local point of view, the ritual had a central role for the well-being of the whole community, and girls who tried to avoid it got into trouble within their families. In his dissertation Miettinen concluded that missionaries did not exactly know what actually happened in *ohango* and thus imagined it more filled with sex than it really was. At least it was a big shame for a girl getting pregnant before she had been initiated in *ohango*, originally even a reason to be killed. So the ritual in fact protected the girls from very early pregnancies, whereas the missionaries thought it would urge them into sexual escapade.<sup>513</sup> Nampala got similar results in her interviews in Owamboland: In traditional rites the girls went through tests that they were not pregnant. Babies that were born of pre-*ohango* pregnancies were considered to bring bad luck, not only to the mother or child, but to the whole kingdom.<sup>514</sup>

Marriage normally produced children. “Having no children was a very bad thing.”<sup>515</sup> Traditionally, a man could even bring some relative to sleep with his wife, if there was no child otherwise. Mr Hamurenge related this to the matrilineal system: “I can only inherit things from my uncles and not from my father, because I could be anybody’s child.”<sup>516</sup>

Albino babies were thrown to the river in the past, tied to a black log. According to Mr Hamurenge people believed that the creature would that way come “back to life into a normal skin.”<sup>517</sup> They understood the “life as a circle; when something dies, it will come alive in another form.”<sup>518</sup> For me, this argument sounds like Hindu reincarnation, which is not really an African way of thinking, but it probably better compares to the anthroponymic system, where names of relatives are given to babies.

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<sup>512</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013 & 28.7.2013.

<sup>513</sup> Miettinen 2005, 314–323.

<sup>514</sup> Nampala 2006, 28–29.

<sup>515</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>516</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>517</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>518</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

In Africa it is common that the personal names do not only refer to the persons, but more or less are equal to the persons themselves. The person of a past generation is alive, if the namesake is alive.<sup>519</sup> According to Mr Hamurange, naming the child after a namesake means honouring the person. At the same time it brings responsibility. “If I’m no longer able to provide for my child, she can go to the namesake.”<sup>520</sup> In any case a deep bond is created between namesakes.

Missionary accounts from the past describe divorce as very common,<sup>521</sup> but an informant pointed out that public opinion restricted it to cases such as adultery, drunkenness or being too lazy.<sup>522</sup> Nowadays, although no one recommends divorce in general, it is possible in ELCIN, because Lutherans do not consider marriage a sacrament.<sup>523</sup> Human people do make mistakes. Despite his Catholic background Mr Semethe pondered about divorce:

And I look at life as the two-way street. Sometimes, what we think is right, maybe it’s not right. Sometimes people other way think it’s our right partner, but maybe they are not our right partner. -- Marriage is about being happy not one part, but both part. So sometimes of course we make harsh decisions and end we regret, but sometimes one learn through mistakes. -- But what I think about marriage, the big thing is people should be able to compromise. That is very important.<sup>524</sup>

He also analysed the relationship of marriage and religion deeper:

In my opinion they are related together, because normally religion is about one staying from bad things to good things. To be humble, to be helpful... that is all like religion. Is about love, to love one another. -- How do you raise up your kids, if you and your husband or wife don’t love one another?<sup>525</sup>

In addition, he wished for the church workers to come and visit the families when they are amidst their routines or problems of life, not only in wedding ceremonies or funerals.

It’s good, if religion could – especially those people, who got married officially in the church – is good for the religion or the pastor or deacon maybe to have time to -- visit them, see, what they encountering, how you can help them related to the God’s word. Because some people are officially married, but the church -- won’t help them any further. Sometimes some people still need the church leaders to come in and help them. Maybe they might have a problem in their religion or in their marriage or raising up their children or maybe some of the family member was disturbing them or sick. I think that’s good work. -- I think it’s good for the church leaders to come and really to give me some encouragement. Not after the burial everybody’s gone – it is when I really need attention, God’s attention.<sup>526</sup>

This would be a good guideline anywhere in the world, but of course it is also a question of resources.

<sup>519</sup> Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003, 47–49, 54.

<sup>520</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>521</sup> For example, LS 1933, 71-72: *Toimintaa Lupalassa*; Eckl 2004, 369; Fisch 2004, 201.

<sup>522</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>523</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>524</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>525</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>526</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

### 4.3. Traditional Healing and Witchcraft

Healing has been at the core of traditional beliefs. Sickness is a condition where people often feel helpless and need higher powers to help. Mr Katombera described his parents' beliefs.

They believed in some superstitions of healing. -- That when someone is sick, [it is] not necessarily [at] hospital that this person become well, but you could go to some traditional healers or traditional doctors, who uses some roots or some leaves or some kind of stuff to heal this sick person.<sup>527</sup>

*Foromani* Rebekka Kambundu defined the religion before Christianity that the “people only used witchcraft.”<sup>528</sup>

*Otate* Isak Veijo pointed out that people are not really convinced of the “white healing system” being any better than the traditional one, as they still request help from the healers.<sup>529</sup> Some of my informants also admitted that they had gotten real help by traditional means.<sup>530</sup>

Many healers truly have knowledge of effective herbs. Several specimens of such plants were shown at the Mbunza Living Museum.<sup>531</sup> According to Mr Hamurenge, research has been done on traditional herbal medicines at the University of Namibia, and effective ones have been discovered, for instance for high blood pressure.<sup>532</sup> *Otate* Heikki Ausiku mentioned a plant called devil's glow, the use of which is now regulated by the Namibian government following interest by European pharmacological companies.<sup>533</sup> Animal blood was also a commonly used remedy.<sup>534</sup> Håkan Hellberg, who was working as a missionary doctor in Kavango, recognised the positive effects of many herbal medicines. However, his experience was that the concentration of the effective components varied according to seasons, so a dose that was sometimes correct could be

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<sup>527</sup> Nikolaus Katombera's interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>528</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview as interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe 27.7.2013.

<sup>529</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>530</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013; confirmation candidate's interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>531</sup> At Mbunza Living Museum (2013), we were shown many herbs used as medicine: sour plum was good for diarrhoea, *engamwe* was used as mosquito repellent, powder of wild syringa helps with burns, savannah gardenia helps with muscle pain, the root of *kakata* helps with body pain, powdered shepherd tree is a cure for pimples, *kagurungo* gives infants power to start walking, the roots or leaves of *eduganturo* are the aid for coughing, the resin tree cleans the stomach, camel thorn drink helps with tooth ache, lavender leaves stop nose bleeds – and *rusannana* removes the bad spirit, when somebody's spouse has passed away. According to the museum guide, even ordinary people knew these herbs while the traditional healers had more extensive knowledge. More lists of traditional herbal medicines in McGurk & Gibson 1981, 78–79 (referring to Eedes 1933) and Cheikhoussef et al 2011.

<sup>532</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>533</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>534</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.



perilous at another time. Naturally there were also otherwise dangerous or simply inefficient methods.<sup>535</sup>

Long before doing this study one of my former students surprised me by stating that the traditional healers, *vanganga*, are very much respected. I had learnt a crusader attitude that they are servants of devil against whom a Christian must fight. The truth is somewhere in between. “But now the *nganga* himself, it’s fine, is good, because he gave medicine to heal people. But now the other part of the *nganga*’s or the witchcraft to reach people, it’s not good.”<sup>536</sup> Genuine helping, knowledge of natural remedies, dangerous witchcraft and mercenary behaviour are often entangled together.

Mr B’s account for traditional doctors stated that “some is good, some is bad.”<sup>537</sup> According to him some of the traditional doctors are just cheating, because they want money.<sup>538</sup> They have different tools for the treatment, such as chalk for drawing or a knife for cutting wounds. Some wear special garments like animal skins, some have just normal clothes.<sup>539</sup> Nowadays the traditional doctors usually come from other countries, in the year before the interviews there was one from Zambia around.<sup>540</sup>

Mr A told about his experience with a healer. His father was no more able to walk because of a sore leg. The family had first tried everything they could, they had also brought him to a medical doctor. But nothing helped.

And then came... came that witchdoctor. I can call him a witch, is not a healer. -- Me, I personally don’t believe in them. But then my sisters and my brothers were insisting we need to help him. But him was a believer of such things, my late father.

Then we decided, we called him in our house. So, he came in. But he said, “No, if you want me to help you, I need 7500 [Namibian dollars, about 750 euros].” Imagine! It was a lot of money. -- “Before I try to heal or to do anything I would like to screen... to screen him and see, what is wrong, what has make him like that.” OK. --

From there I put up his things: keys, some beavers[?] funny looking creatures and, yeah, some wood-carvings, which looks scary. And he had fake eyes. --

From there he asked... he asked my late father to go there to be screened, to sit somewhere, where we placed his skins of leopards and other things. Then he told us, “No, we don’t have a schedule -- somebody have taken it. So I cannot see what problem.”

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<sup>535</sup> Hellberg 2006, 54–55. Håkan Hellberg was a Finnish missionary doctor working in Nkurenkuru from 1958 to 1963.

<sup>536</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>537</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>538</sup> Mr B’s problem in general was shortage of money, but the traditional doctors have demanded their pay also in the past. For example, Eckl 2004, 400 (referring to Gorrhardt 1921).

<sup>539</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>540</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013. *Foromani* Rebekka Kambundu also confirmed that “now it’s the neighboring countries that are coming to bring this here, because they want money.” Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 28.7.2013, interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe.

Then he said, "OK, bring your wives, bring your kids." So we all passed through.

Then he said, "OK, my eye can see that there is something that has been buried in your house." OK," we said, "Go ahead."

Now that's when he said to one of his boys to run around in the house and dig like an animal, until he came out with something, which looks like a... what is this... a snail or something. Yes.

Then he told us, "OK, this is a snail with horns." Funny looking horns and some bits. -- Yeah, he told us, "This is now the thing, which makes your leg like that. And from now on I'll treat you." OK. --

[A month later] he was better. He was happy, he was cured.

But then I told him, why I don't believe. [The following years] the legs started, and this time it was worse, until he passed on.

Then he referred to the same guy, because him, he could not trust the hospital enough. He was referring, "Go, get that witch guy. He did something good other time." --

He did, but this time around was not successful. So by the time like my father failed, he was tired and had to be taken to the hospital, it was very late. Yeah.

So now I keep on reminding everybody, "See, what I told from the beginning! I don't trust these guys. It's just fake."

Then I came to learn that every time everywhere he goes trying to get that witch or whatever thing, is the same thing that he buried or picked up from our house, the same thing that he picks in Nkurenkuru, the same thing everywhere he goes. -- And witchcraft is present. So it's this bad.<sup>541</sup>

Mr A's opinion was that this man was "a witch, not a doctor,"<sup>542</sup> and "he fakes people to collect money."<sup>543</sup> Usually a traditional healer is on the move all the time. He can be reached by phone unless he is too far, for example in Malawi collecting herbs.<sup>544</sup>

Mr Katombera used to see a traditional healer several times in his childhood. When he got sick, his mother called the healer to help.

And then they will put some pot on the fire. They put those roots and other things that the doctor put there, and then they will take some kind of... they take a branch with leaves from a tree. They put it in that, they dip it that hot water with other stuffs that they put there, and then do this to you. That hot water from there go to your body. -- They will cover you kind of in a blanket so that you are inhaling that smoke, so that you get well.<sup>545</sup>

Here I first thought that hot water was burning the skin, but fortunately it was a description of inhaling vapours. Already as a child Mr Katombera wanted to stay far away from traditional healers.

I say, "Even if I'm sick, I'd rather die than I make..." -- So most of these things I used to refuse. And I said, "The day this will done to me, is when I'm critically sick, that I cannot run." -- That's the first day, when I heard them first mentioning God. -- "*Karunga kwa kapi a mu danene.*" [You must not play with God.] --

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<sup>541</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>542</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>543</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>544</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>545</sup> Nikolaus Katombera's interview 8.3.2015.

I kept asking myself questions: Now if they are mentioning *Karunga* and there is this witchdoctor here, how related are they? And that's when I started, when the doctor went, when nobody's sick, we are just chatting, and then I asked them, "What did you mean by 'don't joke with God'? Who is God?" Then they said, "No, you see, we have ancestors. People, our grand-grandfather, people have died. Those people are watching over us. So if you do these funny things that you are doing, is like you are disrespecting them and they can backfire on you." Then I saw them: "Ahaa, so by *Karunga* now they are like connecting that to ancestors."<sup>546</sup>

So, according to Mr Katombera's testimony, traditional healing, ancestors and God are somehow related. Healing used to be religious, and refusing a healing procedure was taken as disrespect against ancestors. The ancestors were mediators between a person and God. Sometimes the "traditional treatment is more like spiritual healing"<sup>547</sup> – that actually comes close to healing by prayer in the new churches.

Even *otate* Isak Veijo had consulted a traditional healer for a snake bite. At a hospital they would have had to know what kind of snake it was, but he didn't know. He did not feel the bite immediately, but it started to bother him maybe after a week. The healer woman took some leaves, chewed them and put them on the sore skin. It worked. *Otate* Isak Veijo, however, pointed out that he would not go to other healers because he did not want to get involved with witchcraft.<sup>548</sup>

As a watchman for correct doctrine Bishop Johannes Sindano spoke against the traditional healers. Here follows an excerpt of the discussion with him.

We can call them herbalist. They know some kind of fruits or leaves, who can care some kind of diseases, they know it. But because of not showing this to everybody, they will lose their proof. They {are} doing some other tactic even to tell you some false things. Instead of saying that – you see – you need this medicine or roots of this or leaves of this trees, no, they tell you some tricks and tricks, and then after that they will give you the medicine. When you are healed, they say, "Is OK, now we did our job, you have to pay." --

Yeah, some is only for money. But some is [of] help, because they know exactly, what kind of illness you have. Yeah. And then they will not tell exactly the trees, the result or what they did, but they tell you some tricks. Now that they will cure you and then you will believe now: "Oh, the medical doctor is not able to do, but this medicine which you give me." Which means, the laziness or the understaff of those medical doctors. So they are not treat the people very well to see and examine to see the cause of that problem.

- *So you think that there should be more doctors...*

More doctors! We should pay more doctors and more pharmacist to get those roots and leaves – is a lot here in Africa. But the African themselves should study pharmacy, or the pharmacist should find out those kind of medicine in the natural trees of Africa.

- *But people should get rid of those traditional doctors?*

Yeah, we should educate more, more, more of our people.

- *And the traditional healing does not fit together with Christianity?*

<sup>546</sup> Nikolaus Katombera's interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>547</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>548</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

Yes. [The Namibian way of saying 'yes' here means actually 'no,' confirming the statement of the question.]

- *OK. Do you think that it always has something to do with like evil spirits?*

Yes. Yes. Sometimes they have that.

- *Yeah sometimes. But does it always have?*

Not always. Sometimes. I say that most of them they are clever to know, what kind of roots and trees, which they can heal... or that kind of illness. But because of avoiding you to know yourself and to do that things for yourself, they will play some tricks to you. And then the tricks sometimes connected with some evil things. --

Because there are some disease which our European medicine is not able to cure.

Yeah. Because, when you are in Europe, [for] the disease there God provide also the curing in the nature of that area. So when you come in Africa, the disease of Africa [can] also be cured with the natural resources of Africa. Like you... the tree what you have in Finland is not the tree in Kavango.<sup>549</sup>

Obviously the bishop had accepted teaching of the past missionaries, for whom traditional medicine was evil. According to the bishop, the natural herbs are there for cure and the traditional healers do have correct information of them. That knowledge, however, should be under established medical research and institutions so that the tricky and evil aspects of traditional medicine could be cleansed out. Many more African professionals in scientific medicine and pharmacy should be trained, and knowledge of local natural remedies should be studied for common benefit.

In confirmation schools, too, the pastors teach against traditional healers. I had the following discussion with the confirmation candidate:

- *So if you went to such a doctor, did it help you?*

Yeah. Because the time before I went there, I was having... I was not sleeping during the night, because when you like wake up, your body is very tired, is like you did something. That's the thing that made me to go there. It's like now I can... now my body is different than before.

- *Is it more relaxed?*

Yeah. But that doesn't mean, if you like go to witchdoctors, then you cannot come back to your church.

- *But do you think that those are kind of opposite things? That the Christian should not go there? Or if it's good to go?*

Yeah. It is good to go. But you like... the person that... because it's like to the first... to the second commandment?

- *So you feel that it is against God?*

Yeah, it is. What's the? It's like *walye o kerere nge novakarunga nawopeke* [First commandment]. It's like you are putting God with...

- *Taking another god?*

God. That's the thing. It's like you are jumping God's will. Then you like... if you like go there, it doesn't mean, you don't need to come back on church. You come back, but you confess on it for God to forgive you.<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>550</sup> Confirmation candidate's interview 25.7.2013.

Ordinary people, then, are used to going to traditional doctors, if they do not get help otherwise. However, they feel somewhat guilty about that, because the teaching of the church is clearly against traditional medicine. It is considered as being against God like the missionaries have been teaching. In the case of the confirmation candidate, she got the cure by bathing in water containing substance collected from some trees, and according to her the treatment really helped. The healer did not have any special costumes and did not utter any magic spells. The confirmation candidate summarised her experience, “It helps, but it’s against God.”<sup>551</sup> In her opinion the pastors “just have to understand.”<sup>552</sup> She also added a warning of healers who cheat.

You cannot trust all of them. Some are just there because of money. There are some, who can help, but not all of them.<sup>553</sup>

The traditional healers are, however, slowly disappearing from Kavango.

I think during my childhood it was very easy [to find a traditional doctor]. But now, although even now they are still found -- now people are getting enlightened and they are moving a little further and further away from that. But I wouldn’t say that they have moved completely away from there,<sup>554</sup>

estimated Mr Katombera, while Mr Semethe mentioned a traditional healer who had been in his village in his youth but had since died. Mr Semethe added that nowadays “they don’t have that quality like the old ways, they just... they just want money.”<sup>555</sup>

*Otate* Heikki Ausiku would welcome more traditional healers to the region, not the fake ones telling lies, but good ones knowing the natural herbs. At the moment they are “very, very few.”<sup>556</sup> According to him the old specialists are long gone, in earlier decades missionaries frightened them away. He mentioned that *Otate* Håkan tried to teach some of his “colleagues,” but it was not very easy.<sup>557</sup> In his memoirs Dr Håkan Hellberg tells about three traditional healers who were his patients, but who passed away. One had a heart disease, but used the pills for his own patients without taking the medicine himself. Another had taken his own herbal medicine and gotten such a serious liver poisoning that there was nothing to be done. The third one had tumours in his stomach, but did not allow

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<sup>551</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>552</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>553</sup> Confirmation candidate’s interview 25.7.2013.

<sup>554</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>555</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>556</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>557</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

operating them. Dr Hellberg got prestige by having taken life from the competitors!<sup>558</sup>

In any case, the teaching of ELCIN is against traditional healing. *Otate* Isak Veijo explained:

But the problem now is that -- they don't just stop there in finding out that you have this problem and we give you this root or what. They continue to the extent of finding how it were... where it came from. This is where I think it clashes with the church. Diseases are there, they are part of whatever, it doesn't necessarily every time to be caused by your enemy. But the witchcraft is playing in that area where always you have to find out who caused the disease or who caused the death. Many times it causes a lot of hatred between the people, even more problems than just hatred.<sup>559</sup>

"Witchdoctors" are dangerous, because they try to find out the culprit, the actual witch, *murodi*, who used witchcraft to cause the disease. The reason, then, for someone to go to a traditional healer is not only to get healthy, but to find out who is to blame. A classic example is Evans-Pritchard's study on Azande in (South) Sudan. They understood well, for example, that one dies if trampled by an elephant, but this reasoning was not enough for them. They also wanted to know why it happened to exactly that person on exactly that moment, and witchcraft could be an explanation.<sup>560</sup> Malevolent persons or spirits, then, are thought to be the ultimate cause. Beliefs like this have by no means disappeared.

Affirmed by the Africans themselves, witchcraft is the serious aspect in African tradition that conflicts Christianity and has to be condemned. Even nowadays sad incidents happen because of belief in witchcraft. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku told about a boy who had beaten an old woman, because she had given him "something" in a dream. Another case was a widow of whom people said that she had killed her husband with sorcery in order to get money, and tried to enter her home and beat her. The court did not find the woman guilty; it was only rumours about witchcraft.<sup>561</sup> "That's what we are having in our congregation now. And nowadays it is still strong."<sup>562</sup>

Mr A told the following case:

There are people with some ritual attitudes there. People want to get... you know in Africa, it's a common thing for people to use parts from other human beings for instance.

- *Do you think it's still happening?*

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<sup>558</sup> Hellberg 2006, 43. Although different worlds, modern European and traditional African, collided here, Dr Hellberg showed an anthropologically analytic mind-set and, as far as I know, he was always respectful towards local people.

<sup>559</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>560</sup> Evans-Pritchard 1937, 74.

<sup>561</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>562</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

It is still happening. It's going on, it's going on...

- *Here in Kavango?*

In Kavango. There is a businessman, though he has never been arrested or there is no concrete proof, but everybody knows about him, they talk about it. He's having a shebeen, and people say [if] you go there especially in the evening, the toilets and taps you flush there's blood instead of water, and in the house they discovered like a dead body that has been absolved then. Is these things... yeah, that happens. So he even wanted to construct one shebeen here, he was ejected by the community. --

- *OK. But if people know that somebody is doing this kind of things, how do they go to those shebeens anymore?*

No, the thing is, they wouldn't be unless those parts are which attracts you. So he does that to put on the business, to attract you. I don't know how it happens, it's witchcraft. It have to do with some African spirits. Is just to attract you to his place. So in actually everything that he does the business there is just bloody business.

- *OK. But do you mean that... with this attraction that people just somehow secretly get attracted to that place or are the people curious to go and see what's really happening?*

No, people are attracted not knowing...<sup>563</sup>

This story illustrates a bloody business for gaining body parts necessary for traditional treatments, and people are attracted to the trap without understanding it themselves. This is the only story of this kind that my informants told of present-day Namibia, but I have read stories about ritual murders from old Kavango missionaries.<sup>564</sup> For comparison, in Tanzania, "witchdoctors" are especially after albino people, because their body parts are believed to have special power.<sup>565</sup> Ritual murders are not extinct from this globe.

The witches, if they would exist, are not really known or recognised by their appearance. It is believed that they disguise themselves. They use a friend's face, or transform into a leopard.<sup>566</sup> A witch usually comes at night and does bad things when no-one sees.

I hear, though it never happened to me, many of the things that I'm telling you here also. Yeah. These witches can come while you are asleep, do all sorts of things. Yeah. And you can't see who is doing this to you. That's how they are doing.

When a person comes like night time, you are my enemy or maybe are just jealous of what you have... When I come night time, I will not come in the shape of me as I am. But you'll see my image. I can come struggle you and then you see. -- But at times I can use my friend's face to cover mine, so the person I'm doing this to will see a friend. -- It's actually a scary something, I don't want to experience it.<sup>567</sup>

It sounds like the fears are not a past phenomenon. Besides thinking that the victim might not recognise the witch, people also believed that "a person could be

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<sup>563</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>564</sup> For example, Okavango 1958, 61–63; Hellberg 2006, 35–38.

<sup>565</sup> Examples of persecution of albinos in Tanzania are easy to find in the internet. For example, Tanzanian albino children 2017 or *Tansanialainen albiinovaiva* 2015.

<sup>566</sup> McGurk & Gibson 1981, 76; Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>567</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

a witch without knowing it herself.”<sup>568</sup> Thus almost anyone could become accused of being a witch.

According to *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu, if someone saw a person in a dream, it meant that this one was bewitching him or her. People really believed in these dreams. Even a dear friend or one’s mother appearing in a dream could be a witch attempting to harm or kill. When I was wondering how anyone could then sleep as it is normal to see dreams, *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu told that there was a test that could be used. If someone was suspected of being a witch, a medicine called *mwade* was made of roots of a certain tree. If the suspect really was a witch, he or she would die when drinking this medicine. If the one was not a witch, then he or she would just vomit.<sup>569</sup>

In addition to diseases and other misfortune, even other events such as strange light phenomena could be explained by witchcraft. Children were also intimidated by keeping them afraid of witchcraft as Mr A’s experience shows.

When we grow up specifically, especially those years when we are here, you can still see some fire, like lights flaking in the dark somewhere there...

- Which was just witchcraft and not real thundering or?

No, no, it’s not cloud or nothing. It’s just witchcraft. And then the parents, which you told see that light, it is actual fire – that we used to be told. It’s, you know, like clay pot, that one, so that is where the fire is. And then this woman, old woman, puts it on her head... --

But it used to help a lot. Cause young ones we were not as freely moving as we are today. Because you are scared to my bubby to the witches. So people will actually stay at home getting story from the parents. That’s how we were educated actually.<sup>570</sup>

According to Mr A, people also believed that missionaries had powers to reveal witches.

Or let me start with the olden days... People feared, if you have witchcraft and you go to church, because they believed the missionaries were able to see witches. Yes. So many of them puts now these things aside, yes, continue with Christianity. But now as time went, many of the missionaries are gone back. Then people have come to believe that “Hah, the church is just a matter of you believing and reading the Bible and nothing these days. No powers that will do anything, if you are a witch.” So some people decided to have their witchcraft, but yet be in the church in the same time. Yes.<sup>571</sup>

With time, most people in Kavango became Christians and left witchcraft behind. But as the missionaries are now gone and the Lutheran and Catholic churches

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<sup>568</sup> This is Miettinen’s text concerning Owamboland, but as far as I know the people believed similarly in Kavango. Miettinen 2005, 83.

<sup>569</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013. Fisch 2004, 189 also knows this poisonous drink, which was used as a bloodless means to remove dangerous individuals from society. According to Fisch, another method was a hot water trial. If the hand burnt in boiling water, it was an indication of fault.

<sup>570</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>571</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.



seem powerless with no miracles, the people are returning to their beliefs of witchcraft. On the other hand, it is obvious that miracle healing in the new African based churches is sometimes understood as magic.

So in many of the churches now those that leads the church are known to be strong witches. Yes, that's what happening now. The strong believers, those that preaches in churches, are the ones that people fear at first place.<sup>572</sup>

However, Mr A was sure that witchcraft, not only traditional healing, is slowly dying out. Nobody wants it, and as the older generation dies away, witchcraft and the belief in it die out. "But if you go deep down in the land there, if you go Caprivi and side, yeah, it's very common."<sup>573</sup> Mr A himself was well educated and wanted to keep distance to the old beliefs, but clearly he had grown up in a community that feared witchcraft.

One has to be careful, when judging these phenomena. The concept of a "witchdoctor" is itself a misunderstanding. One should not be a witch and a doctor at the same time, because a traditional healer attempts to reveal the witch, not to use witchcraft himself. Earlier, foreigners used to call the traditional doctors "witchdoctors." In case the traditional doctor is simply faking and doing harm, I would consider the term "witchdoctor" justified. However, there is no reason to label as a "witchdoctor" a nature healer that uses certain roots or bark or other plant material to make his medicament, *mutji*,<sup>574</sup> or one that is a bonesetter<sup>575</sup>.

There was a lot of serious misunderstanding, not only confusing concepts, on the part of the past missionaries as they judged everything traditional African as pagan and evil. As far as I have experienced the Namibians have anyway loved Finnish missionaries. They seem to be forgiving and understanding, too. When asked, *Otate* Heikki Ausiku articulated: "There's no mistake, but that time it is how they understood, how they accepted their what..."<sup>576</sup> "It's easy to oppose, if you don't understand,"<sup>577</sup> pointed Mr Hamurenge.

On the other hand, evil witchcraft is reality in Africa. People believe in it, they are afraid of it, and they can perform evil deeds because of it. Tuulikki Pietilä, a researcher of social anthropology at the University of Helsinki, has written:

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<sup>572</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>573</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>574</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>575</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>576</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>577</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

The multidimensionality and flexibility of beliefs in witchcraft enable them to transform continually. This is why they are persistent, suitable mirrors of the phenomena and problems in each time.

Witchcraft provides a language to perceive evil that has been only vaguely experienced, but it is more than a language or code, because people believe in its existence. This is why it hardly gives in to attempts to put it under control: public officials or statutes of law simply cannot decree witchcraft away from the African world. Despite determined and lengthy attempts even Christianity has not succeeded to eradicate it, and neither have various modernisation and development projects carried out and required by foreign donors.<sup>578</sup>

Pietilä considers belief in witchcraft so viable to change that it hardly disappears by means attempted this far. Regarding Kavango area, South African government banned the evils of slavery, witchery, child prostitution and cultivation of cannabis already in 1928.<sup>579</sup> Slavery did disappear. Cases of burning or drowning a person accused of witchcraft, however, have also been reported every now and then.<sup>580</sup> My informants verify that things related to witchcraft can escalate to alarming dimensions even today. Pietilä is also very critical of anthropology, asking whether it has become a force that maintains evil as it aims to understand various phenomena without judging them. For Christian mission, there should be no question about fighting against evil.

#### **4.4. Ancestors, Kingship and Rituals**

In 1955, missionary Lahja Väänänen wrote:

The rituals of the tribe are very poor. Practically the only ones left are preparing girls for marriage, which happens individually and ends with a big dancing festival, and *nzambinzambi*, an offering of the first grains to the deceased.<sup>581</sup>

Also Mr Katombera told about his guardians, who were not yet Christians, “They have not really worshipped anything.”<sup>582</sup> However, he added that the traditional

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<sup>578</sup> Pietilä 2011, 242–243. ”Noituususkomusten moniulotteisuus ja joustavuus tekevät niistä alati muuntautumiskykyisiä ja siksi sitkeitä ja sopivia peilejä kunkin ajankohdan ilmiöille ja ongelmille. Noituus antaa kielen hahmottaa usein vasta epämääräisesti koettua pahaa, mutta se on enemmän kuin kieli tai koodi, sillä noituuden olemassaoloon uskotaan. Tämän takia se taipuu heikosti hallinnoitavaksi: viranomaiset tai laki eivät voi yksinkertaisesti säätää noituutta pois afrikkalaisesta maailmasta. Määrätietoisista ja pitkäjänteisistä yrityksistä huolimatta kristinuskokaan ei ole siihen usein pystynyt sen enempää kuin erilaiset ulkomaisten avunantajien toteuttamat ja vaatimat modernisaatio- ja kehitysprojektit.”

<sup>579</sup> For example, Fisch 2004, 191; Fisch 2009, 34.

<sup>580</sup> For example, Fisch 2004, 189.

<sup>581</sup> Väänänen 1955, 153–154. ”Heimon rituaalit ovat perin köyhät, jällellä on oikeastaan vain tyttöjen valmistaminen avioliittoon ja tämä tapahtuu aina yksilöllisesti ja päättyy suuriin tanssiaisiin, sekä *Nzambinzambi*, vainajille uutisviljan uhraaminen.” – Väänänen wrote about the Kwangali tribe, but actually she lived among the Mbunza. She seems to have considered these as equal because of the same language.

<sup>582</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015.

healing process often contained an offering of the blood of an animal. “So for me that made me think that’s a little connect some kind of worship.”<sup>583</sup>

In fact, the basic ritual has typically been sacrificing. For anything that was being done, a sacrifice had to be made, said Mr A.

If it’s harvesting time take a bit of it to the place where you kind of worship. -- You drop a bit of whatever that you harvest. If you slaughter something, take a piece of some blood you put there.

So whatever that I do, if I want like the rain, if it’s not coming to the fields, there’s nothing coming out, so I have to go there now, even go to the graveyard at times to pray, slaughter them a cow there in the belief that the dead will come and provide all that.<sup>584</sup>

Bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano agreed with him about the past traditions.

When you start getting new food, you can’t eat it, first you have to offer it [for] the ancestors, so that they can eat first, and then you.<sup>585</sup>

If a person ate before the ancestors got their share, he was even punished by the king, he added.<sup>586</sup>

There have also been religious experts called *esimbi*, somewhat similar to priests, in the past. They were actually clan leaders, but acted simultaneously as religious professionals of ceremonies. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku explained:

They can make some prayer intercessions in their village. If there’s hunger or drought or disease, they can pray. But the prayer, what we had, had to be directed to *vadimu* -- the forefathers. The forefathers and those of forefathers they will make it, take the prayer somewhere.<sup>587</sup>

In the case of a threat, such as drought, the *esimbi* performed a small ritual, for which they brought some water and killed a chicken.

Then they can pray *Nyambi-Nyambi*, and, “Can you give us rain?” And then they would mention or enumerate some old, old late forefathers, that the children are dying here, they can remember. And they can also provide wealth, they can prevent epidemic diseases and they can also provide fertility, fertility among the clan. -- They would throw the water and the chicken there. And then they run back to the house.<sup>588</sup>

So rituals were performed for the welfare of the clan.

In Kavango, like among the Bantu peoples in general, the principle objects for worship have been ancestors, called *vadimu* in Kwangali. The deceased ones are not considered truly dead, but they are still part of the family and influencing people’s lives. It was exactly the ancestors that were prayed for and sacrificed to in the past.<sup>589</sup> The people believed in the ability of their ancestors to assist so that

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<sup>583</sup> Nikolaus Katombera’s interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>584</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>585</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>586</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>587</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>588</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>589</sup> Mr C’s e-mail 1.10.29008; Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013; Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

there would be success in society and in their work.<sup>590</sup> ”I would love to save respect and dedication, commitment that they had in worshipping the ancestors,”<sup>591</sup> wrote Mr C, meaning that he wished there was a similar kind of commitment for Christianity. On the other hand, the ancestors could also cause sicknesses because of jealousy. Then a certain type of necklace, a *siranda*, could be of help as an amulet.<sup>592</sup>

Although the ancestors were prayed to, they were not understood as godly figures; instead, they were more like mediators between the living people and God.<sup>593</sup> In a corresponding way, mediators were needed on many occasions between living people; for example, when requesting something from the king or when proposing to a girl. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku surmises that the belief in ancestors and worshipping them has disappeared by now.<sup>594</sup> They may still be mentioned in some sayings like “*Nkurandakuru tu tareni!*” (Forefathers, watch us!), but according to him “it is just a culture.”<sup>595</sup>

Because the ancestors have been such important figures in traditional African religion, some African Christian theologians think that we should consider Jesus as the greatest ancestor; this would make him understandable to the people.<sup>596</sup> *Otate* Isak Veijo had a strong opinion that this would only confuse the people.<sup>597</sup> Bishop Sindano, instead, found it fitting.

Because the African in the old ways say, that ancestor, because he is died -- is now there to speak for us to God. Therefore, when you want lucky, you have to speak to the ancestor, because he is the one, who knows you, so that he can communicate your message to God to assist you. Yeah. -- We as Christian, our ancestor is Jesus. We want to speak with Jesus to speak to God for us, on our behalf. And then the Roman Catholic say, “Maria.” I think, the same.

But the old ways they say, my grandfather, who passed away, he can talk [for] me to God and assist me. Because always they say, those ancestor or passed away, by their spirit still among us. -- Christians in nowadays, they say, “Ancestor is not able to talk for us.” But Jesus is our ancestor, who can talk to God on our behalf. Yeah.<sup>598</sup>

Thus Jesus can be understood as the ancestor, because he is there to talk to God on behalf of us. However, ancestors in the sense of deceased people are of no help.

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<sup>590</sup> Mr C’s e-mail 1.10.29008.

<sup>591</sup> Mr C’s e-mail 1.10.2008.

<sup>592</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>593</sup> Fisch 2009, 15.

<sup>594</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>595</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>596</sup> Some discussion about the topic is found for example in Jesus as Ancestor 2009.

<sup>597</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>598</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

The traditional king, *hompa*, has lost much of his traditional power, “because most of the things have been modernised.”<sup>599</sup> However, “*hompa* is still looked as the wise one,”<sup>600</sup> and he is asked to settle disputes. The traditional courts still exist. Nowadays, there is an obvious conflict between the ideas of Namibia as one nation and the traditional kingdoms, which can be thought of as encouraging division.<sup>601</sup>

Sacral kingship has been common in Africa.<sup>602</sup> The traditional kings have usually been considered as the safeguard of the traditions of his kingdom. The past missionaries believed that the king, with his attitude and example, would be in a decisive position if his natives were to become Christians.<sup>603</sup> It has also been commonly stated that the kings themselves were “difficult”<sup>604</sup> to convert to Christianity. Miettinen, in his dissertation about Owamboland, reversed this so that the ordinary people practically prevented a king from converting. His idea can be summarised as follows: The king’s duty was to perform rituals which were considered essential for the well-being of the community. If he would have converted, the people would have replaced him by another one who would have carried out the rites. Thus, it was safe for a king to convert only when the old beliefs had been weakened by Christianisation.<sup>605</sup>

When asking about the traditional role of the *hompa* in religious terms, *otate* Isak Veijo first denied that the king would have had any religious function. Then, he admitted that because the *hompa* had a high status among his people, his ancestors were consulted on the major issues such as rain.<sup>606</sup> Earlier, the

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<sup>599</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013. – Miettinen’s 2005, 313 conclusion about the diminishing of power of Owambo kings was that “it was in fact colonial rule itself which eroded the power of kings and headmen more than did the missionaries’ activities,” although the official policy was to keep the traditions untouched as far as possible.

<sup>600</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>601</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013; Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013. – Bishop Sindano had a strong opinion that the various cultures of the ethnic groups lead to division, whereas Christianity would unite all people together.

<sup>602</sup> Kallinen 2011, 179–182 gives an example of Asante in Ghana, but similar features are found also elsewhere in Africa.

<sup>603</sup> This is an obvious conclusion already from the very beginning of the Finnish missionary work in Owamboland. The first missionaries tried to spread out to four kingdoms, but it was possible to settle in Ondonga only. Peltola 1958, 40–57.

<sup>604</sup> Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 28.7.2013, the word “difficult” translated in this connection by Stanislaus Semethe. – The first Kwangali *hompa* to be baptised was Olavi Sivute Kangumbe. He was also the first Kwangali king to be able to read and write. His baptism was conducted by missionary Eino Pennanen, who boasted about the conversion of the *hompa*: “We have felled the biggest tree in the land.” The missionary was, however, soon disappointed as the *hompa* took his wives back and returned to “paganism.” Kampungu 1965, 237, 285–286; Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>605</sup> Miettinen 2005, 202.

<sup>606</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

connection between the *hompas* and God seems to have been taken for granted among the Kwangali. Kampungu wrote in 1960s:

When one asks how this “*uhompa*” originated and whence it came, the people usually answer, without hesitation, “*Kua Karunga sa*”, that is, “From God”.<sup>607</sup>

I was surprised to learn that the Kwangali *hompas* is still conducting rain-making rituals nowadays; the offerings had taken place even the same year I made the interviews.<sup>608</sup> Also, the Mbukushu, another Kavango tribe famous for its rain-making skills, had performed the ritual.<sup>609</sup> I thought that this would have been an extinct practice, among the Kwangali at least.<sup>610</sup> The ceremony takes as long as a week and is different from the small offerings by the clans. The rite should be re-enacted where the ancestors of the *hompas* have been buried or in an important place for them. In the past, the ritual was carried out on the Angolan side of the river at the old royal graves, but a newer royal cemetery is next to the royal homestead in Mayara, near Nkurenkuru.<sup>611</sup> The ritual is a secret, and only elderly people are allowed to participate, both men and women, perhaps starting from forty years of age onwards.<sup>612</sup>

The core of the ritual is sacrificing a black ox, which symbolises a thunder cloud.<sup>613</sup> The ox is slaughtered before the sunrise in the morning and is “cut into pieces without skinning it,”<sup>614</sup> and cooked in daylight. Then it must be eaten completely, even the skin and the fur. An important detail is that it must be eaten without salt. Everything must be eaten on the spot – if one would take some at home, he might add salt there. It is ordinary people, not spirits, eating the meat, but before eating there is the prayer to the forefathers.<sup>615</sup> The quintessence of the prayer is: “Give us some rain. We are suffering.”<sup>616</sup> Otate Heikki Ausiku explained the tradition:

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<sup>607</sup> Kampungu 1965, 411.

<sup>608</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013; Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013; Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>609</sup> According to Mr B, there were the two *hompas*, Kwangali and Mbukushu, together performing the ritual in Mayara in 2013. – The Shambyu did not make rain themselves (not even in the past), but rather they trusted in the help of the neighbouring kings. Rebekka Kambundu’s interview 28.7.2013.

<sup>610</sup> According to missionary legend the rain-making had ended when the ex-patriates returned back home at the dawn of independence and enlightened the *hompas* about meteorology.

<sup>611</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013; Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013; Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>612</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>613</sup> Nampala 2006, 57.

<sup>614</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>615</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013; Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013; Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>616</sup> Mr B’s interview 14.7.2013.

Now if there is a drought all over the community of Rukwangali, people relate that they are *hompa*'s... are people of God, can he help really very soon. And then they would sacrifice a cow for the whole to ask *Nyambi* to provide rain, to be merciful to his people, because they are dying... it is not good. These are how we associate... with terrestrial powers and with the heavenly father.<sup>617</sup>

Because the *hompa* has been the leading figure for his people, his ancestors can mediate between the people and God, *Nyambi*. In the prayer, names of the ancient forefathers are mentioned.<sup>618</sup>

Most of my informants had the opinion that the rain-making ritual was only "culture." Otate Heikki Ausiku formulated it:

I think, it is to separate from a spiritual thing, but this is just... -- this is part of the community culture. -- Most of our real houses, in them people are Christians, they practice Christianity.<sup>619</sup>

Bishop Sindano laughed about rain-making, as he often laughs: "Sitentu [the Kwangali king] did it this year, but no help!"<sup>620</sup> He added:

Yeah, we are not encourage it, because we want to encourage them to God. -- We say, we have to come together to pray. God will assist us. And then many times God assist. Then we want the people to come and believe that God is there, instead of believing the ancestors.<sup>621</sup>

The young, educated generation does not believe in these kinds of rituals either: "Like [my father] I know he is dead. And there's nothing like a connection that I can make with him. -- There's nothing like you make rain for."<sup>622</sup>

It can be assumed that there have been a lot of ritual celebrations in the past. The people in Kavango used to celebrate the rain as well as the harvest.<sup>623</sup> The basic reason for the disappearing of most rituals is still unclear, however. Mr Hamurenge evaluated that it happened because "today's people appreciate formal education."<sup>624</sup> Presumably, Christianity is also one factor. However, if a missionary from the 1950s described the rituals as poor,<sup>625</sup> it is obvious that the diminishing of rituals has been taking place already before any large proportion of the people were educated or Christian.

The other rites were not really talked about in the interviews, as the informants were Christians viewing the past from today's perspective. The traditional marriage has been described in chapter 4.2. Here, however, I will add a couple of lines about other rites of passage. Mr Hamurenge mentioned a ritual for

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<sup>617</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>618</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>619</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>620</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>621</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>622</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>623</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>624</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>625</sup> Väänänen 1955, 153–154.

when a new baby was taken to the public.<sup>626</sup> Dr Fisch has preserved a description of this ritual in more detail. Right after the birth, the mother and child had to spend their time in isolation. The ritual to finish the isolation included cutting the hair of the baby for the first time. The hair and nails were collected and put into a hole of a tree or alternatively in the mud of the river to produce fortune. Usually a *nganga* was called to give a protective amulet to the baby, too. The parents spent the first night together, and in the morning the baby was carried out and the “world” shown to him or her. A baby boy got a miniature bow and a baby girl was given a miniature pestle so that the child could take care that there is enough food in the house.<sup>627</sup>

Regarding the funerals, it is known that corpses were traditionally buried under the corral. In certain cases, such as when one was accused of witchcraft, the body was thrown into the river.<sup>628</sup> Putting the corpse into the grave happened silently, but after it had been done, mourning started and lasted for several days. In the end, there were cleansing rituals for the closest family members, those ones who had been handling the corpse, and the personal belongings of the deceased one.<sup>629</sup> Nowadays, the traditional funeral rituals are gone, but people still gather together to comfort those left behind.

#### **4.5. Relationship between Religion and Culture**

When planning the study, I was supposed to find out how the informants understand the concepts of religion and culture, as well as their differences, – in order to be able to talk about religion and culture at all. The concepts are, however, very difficult and far from clear even to best trained specialists. Culture has been defined in hundreds of different ways,<sup>630</sup> and the line between religion and ideology or worldview is obscure. So, it is no wonder that it turned out to be difficult to grasp any definitions in the interviews. Many other issues related to culture and religion, in addition to those discussed above, came to light in the interviews, and I deal with them in this chapter.

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<sup>626</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>627</sup> Fisch 1980, 7–19.

<sup>628</sup> Förg 1968, 58, 59.

<sup>629</sup> Förg 1968, 62–66.

<sup>630</sup> Bailey & Peoples 2011, 18.



When trying to define culture, the informants usually referred to traditional culture or other religions.<sup>631</sup> *Otate* Isak Veijo, for example, explained it in the following way: “With us Christians we’ve got only one God, but with the cultures they’ve got different gods.”<sup>632</sup> He continued explaining that in the other cultures there was a certain god giving “this” and another god giving “that.”<sup>633</sup> He clearly equated culture with a religion other than Christianity. A similar idea can be found in Mr A’s sentence: “The culture is something traditional. -- Then Christianity, one view is the way that you are made to leave the old habits like worshipping those idols, the ancestors and things.”<sup>634</sup> Another example shows a similar kind of thinking: “Like witchcraft it’s a tradition... is a culture.”<sup>635</sup> Obviously, the Namibians use the word culture often as a shortening for “traditional culture.” The university teacher Mr Hamurenge was able to relate culture in more western terms, “culture gives identity,”<sup>636</sup> whereas Christian religion is something which gives order and morals.<sup>637</sup>

According to *otate* Isak Veijo, people easily mix things up. That is why there should be a clear distinction between Christianity and other cultural things. Traditional music can be used for Christian purposes, but there is also a danger of confusion. It is relatively common to take melodies from somewhere else and put them into another context; even Martin Luther used this method for creating new hymns. But Isak Veijo had a word of warning: “You come with the nice message from the church, and then that same melody will take another message there in the drinking places.”<sup>638</sup> Instead, he did not see any problem in using old European hymn melodies, because Christianity itself had come from Europe.<sup>639</sup> Bishop Sindano considered international hymns valuable: “When we think the hymn... the Christianity hymn, the melody is the same. No matter, which kind of language we can, but the melody is the thing.”<sup>640</sup> For the bishop, one method of guaranteeing the unity of Christians all over the world is by singing the same

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<sup>631</sup> This mixing up of the basic concepts is more understandable against the background that African traditional religion “is inseparably wedded with his own culture, tradition, customs and ritual life.” Kampungu 1965, 155. An African does not traditionally separate religious and other cultural aspects from each other.

<sup>632</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>633</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>634</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>635</sup> Stanislaus Semethe’s interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>636</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>637</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>638</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>639</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>640</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

melodies everywhere. In his opinion, African melodies can similarly be adopted for international use, so they become shared property of the whole Christendom.<sup>641</sup>

There have been various attempts in the field of defining Christianity again in an African way. The emerging new African churches can be considered as one phenomenon in this process. Another way is to give new meanings to Jesus Christ. Jesus as the greatest ancestor is one implementation of this method. Another one is Black Jesus. When thinking about what Jesus did and taught, his skin colour might be an irrelevant point. However, the colonial history of Africa and the apartheid policy of South Africa has made some black theologians think that their Jesus must be black. For *otate* Isak Veijo, this kind of thinking was very confusing. For him it was clear that Jesus was born in Palestine, and we cannot change the history. Talking about a black Jesus sounded as impossible as describing Jesus as a woman. In contextualising “we have to be very, very cautious.”<sup>642</sup>

*Otate* Heikki Ausiku had the opposite opinion. According to him, Christianity and traditions fit together and it is not necessary to leave everything old behind. As an example, there are spiritual beings other than Jesus and God even in the Bible; for him the angels could be equated with the Kwangali ancestors! According to the Bible there is no Greek, there is no Jew – or no Egyptian or other African. Jesus died for all. In *otate* Heikki Ausiku’s opinion, the old cultural practices do not impair faith in God through Jesus Christ. The drums have been taken back, and African melodies and rhythms are coming into use. For *otate* Heikki Ausiku “that is how those African things are to be baptised, to be Christianised.”<sup>643</sup>

Drumming was, indeed, considered as a symbol of paganism. Lahja Väänänen wrote in 1955:

Children at the mission station have already said “good night.” Everything should be peaceful. Then the drum starts making a sound. First it is just hesitating; perhaps it is a small one. But as the night deepens, the sound gets stronger. There are several drums beating together. It is the moonlit early hours of morning. Female voices join the music and yoik rises high in the air. -- Beer has given its share to the music and the hilarity of dance is increasing. It feels like they are celebrating right next to my

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<sup>641</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>642</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>643</sup> Heikki Ausiku’s interview 15.7.2013. He has studied about Latin American liberation theology and South African black power at the theological seminary, where Professor Raimo Harjula and Dr John Mbiti have influenced his thinking. The idea of purifying the “pagan” customs fitting into Christianity has been favoured longer by Catholics than by Lutherans. For example, Kampungu 1965, 152.

window. -- A strange fear and anxiety fill the mind. -- This night is ruled by the drum and drunken yoik, this night has been hallowed to the darkness...<sup>644</sup>

The missionaries' assumption that drumming in the old times was associated with drinking was criticised by *otate* Isak Veijo. According to him drumming did not take place every night either. The missionaries "should have identified where the drumming is coming from."<sup>645</sup> On the Angolan side in winter time, "the drumming mainly come from the ritual of circumcision."<sup>646</sup> That was, however, only for a couple of days when the boys went out, and again after two or three months to welcome them back. The Kwangali themselves did not have circumcision.<sup>647</sup> Then *otate* Isak Veijo added, laughing, that the drumming "for the healing might be continuous, because the hospital was there."<sup>648</sup> So obviously the people were also drumming at the mission hospital! It seems that they understood drumming as an essential part of the healing process. But that had nothing to do with "drinking pleasures."<sup>649</sup> Obviously *otate* Isak Veijo did not consider drumming as related to something bad and evil, on the contrary to what can be read in the old stories by Finnish missionaries.

Similar ideas fit for dancing. The Finnish missionaries of the past considered dancing as a sin; this was a common way of thinking for pietistic Christians in Finland in general. The Kavango people have probably never understood things that way. Clapping of hands and movement of body are important for them.<sup>650</sup> "We dance, because of they are happy,"<sup>651</sup> said Mr B. Dancing was one of God's good gifts for him. Similarly, Mr Hamurenge was asking about the banning of playing the drums: "When God forgives us, are we not supposed to be happy?"<sup>652</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Väänänen 1955, 65. "Aseman lapset ovat jo sanoneet hyvää yötä, kaiken pitäisi olla aivan tavanmukaista. Silloin alkaa rumpu soida. Ensin se ikään kuin kokeillen kaikuu, pienenuoleinen soitin mahtaa olla, mutta yön edetessä vahvistuu ääni, useat rummut soivat yhteen tahtiin. On kuutamoinen aamuyö. -- Naisten äänet yhtyvät mukaan ja joiku kiirii korkeaan ilmaan. -- Nyt on jo olutkin antanut osansa musiikkiin ja tanssin riemu kasvaa. On kuin aivan tuossa akkunan ulkopuolella iloansa pitäisivät. -- Merkillinen pelko ja ahdistus valtaa mielen. -- Tätä yötä hallitsee rumpu ja juopunut joiku, tämä yö on pimeydelle erotettu..."

<sup>645</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>646</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>647</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>648</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>649</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>650</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>651</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>652</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013.

Personal names are an interesting cultural question. Traditional Namibian names usually carry some meaning.<sup>653</sup> *Otate* Heikki Ausiku's first name, however, originates from a Finnish missionary who happened to be visiting from Owamboland, but he does not know more about the visitor. No wonder that he exclaimed: "Even the names were removed to put them in -- Christian names, yeah. Everything you had to deny, your culture that is the sins!"<sup>654</sup>

When Christianity was spreading, the name also revealed whether the person was Christian or not. According to *otate* Heikki Ausiku, many wanted to have a Christian name in order not to be labelled as pagans.<sup>655</sup> Mr Katombera's initial idea about becoming a Christian was the wish to get a new name.<sup>656</sup> Nowadays it more often happens the other way around: people are taking old ethnic names back. For example, the former president Hifikepunye Pohamba was formerly Lucas, and the minister Nangolo Mbumba was Nicodemus.<sup>657</sup> But Christian names are also saved, because a baby must get a name from someone in the family; thus, Namibians have also adopted Finnish names as their own.<sup>658</sup>

Saarelma-Maunumaa writes in her doctoral thesis:

Beside naming children after European missionaries, biblical characters, saints and well-known people, the custom of naming children after close friends and relatives has continued among the Ambo people. -- Hence, the same European and biblical names that were initially adopted from the Europeans and the Bible were transferred from person to person and from one generation to another in the Ambo area. At times, such "namesake chains" could be very long. --

All in all, it is interesting to note that the influence of Christianity and Europeanisation did not destroy the traditional Ambo namesake custom but rather gave it a new Christian slant. As ironic as it may sound, the traditional namesake practise of the Ambos has been one of the major forces in Europeanisation of the Ambo personal nomenclature.<sup>659</sup>

The same applies to Kavango, being culturally close to Owamboland.

In our discussions, we also talked about alcohol. The former missionaries used to link abundant use of alcohol together with "paganism."<sup>660</sup> My informants had to correct my assumptions:

In the past, when we grew up in the old days, young people were not drinking. -- You hardly find a person, I remember those days, you hardly find a person just oo-

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<sup>653</sup> *Otate* Heikki Ausiku mentioned a few examples of names: Ausiku and Hamutenya reveal the time of the day the person was born, Kankara or Simbugu are animals in the bush, Nita, Iita or Haita have been born during a war.

<sup>654</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>655</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>656</sup> Nikolaus Katombera's interview 8.3.2015.

<sup>657</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>658</sup> As an anecdote, a Finnish colleague of mine has spent some time in Namibia with her family. Her son is called Oiva, which is a traditional Finnish name. Namibians were puzzled, "How on earth can he have a Namibian name?"

<sup>659</sup> Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003, 141.

<sup>660</sup> For example, Väänänen 1955, 65.

oo-oo. If they drink, they probably become a little bit intoxicated, but then they go to the house and sleep. In the morning they continue working. They are not sick. They are not like nowadays. Nowadays during the day they are sick people and then at night they are very nice people talking a lot and doing nothing. It's a social evil.<sup>661</sup>

This social evil of today brings diseases, separates families, and causes malnutrition. In the past, alcohol (*marovhu*) was also used, but people could behave.<sup>662</sup> They could drink after the working days, some even up to vomiting, because the alcohol was strong (*nomukondo*). But it was not given to children<sup>663</sup> and even the drunken adults had to show respect to the elders; there were neither bad words nor quarrelling. "They respect, because if they do something wrong, they be taken now to the chief and then you be punished."<sup>664</sup> After gaining independence, such respect seems to be gone.<sup>665</sup>

I also incorrectly believed that the contract workers would have treated their homesickness by drinking alcohol. The workers had to keep themselves in working condition. There were public bars in the locations, indeed, but drinks were not allowed to be taken outside and the places were closed early in the evening. Nowadays drunken groups can be found on the roads any night, and unfortunately many people start drinking at a very young age. The apartheid government used to punish people for distilling home-made spirits; nowadays *kasipembe* is distilled openly. In earlier times both the government and the traditional community put limits, according to *otate* Isak Veijo.<sup>666</sup>

Mr A, whose specialisation was in agricultural economics, was even claiming that alcohol came with the missionaries:

Traditionally or before the Europeans came, one can say alcohol was not a thing that people do. -- It came with Christianity. -- You know, what we used to study. Many things. Missionaries came. Missionaries did not come alone. They came with explorers, they came with traders.

They were the people, the first people, but they were used to approach people. And when they repent, tell them all the Bible. But later those other ones who also benefit. Yeah. That is how it came, when I say missionaries brought it.

Honestly there were traditional like brews people used to take. But it was not a thing where... like in our occasion who see every day drunken, alcohol readily available if you have money. Those days it was tough and only for certain events that it will

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<sup>661</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>662</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>663</sup> According to Mr A, the children could only get *sikundu*, thick gruel-like home-made beer. *Sikundu* contains a little alcohol, which prevents it from getting spoiled in the hot climate, but it is not really intoxicating.

<sup>664</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview as interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe 27.7.2013.

<sup>665</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 27.7.2013.

<sup>666</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

happen. But now when sugar was introduced, something that we didn't have, yeah, people started also sort of brewing issues. Yes.<sup>667</sup>

In fact, explorers and traders came and were followed shortly after by the missionaries. Many obviously considered all the whites as the same group. The important role of sugar was not familiar to me. It is needed for making alcoholic drinks, but it was not originally known in the region. Sugar and alcohol can even be considered as a means of colonisation. "So the only way to get you out to sign any paper is to get you drunk."<sup>668</sup> A sober person would resist.

Alcohol was, in any case, strongly condemned by the missionaries. As an example, there is the experience of bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano. He had started his adult life as a merchant selling alcohol, among other items, and he got a letter from a missionary to remind him about the evils of drinking.<sup>669</sup> According to Miettinen's dissertation, in the 1940s and 1950s drinking had become a problem that the missionaries in South West Africa seriously tackled. Drinking was probably increasing among the people at the time; however, Miettinen reckons that missionaries paid more attention to alcohol because it had become a problem in Finland after the war. With regard to the colonial authorities, they had banned distilled drinks as illegal in South West Africa in the 1920s, although no prohibition can really stop the taps. In 1969, they reversed their policy and consumption of alcohol increased rapidly.<sup>670</sup>

The most interesting question related to culture, and the most difficult to answer, perhaps, is why Africans have adopted Christianity so strongly. A European would suggest that they wanted to benefit from the schools and hospitals that the missionaries brought along, and probably also hoped for a better standard of living that the whites seemed to have. At least Makaranga's story supports the idea of searching for opportunities.<sup>671</sup> Mr C's statement indicates the same: "Majority of people in Namibia are Christians because of Care and health Support given to us by the missionary."<sup>672</sup> Andreas E. Eckl argued in his

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<sup>667</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013. Alcohol concentration "depends on the amount of sugar added to the brew." Eirola et al 1990, 69.

<sup>668</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>669</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>670</sup> Miettinen 2005, 334–341. Eirola et al 1990, 66 stated, "In the shops of Mupapama, the most important commodity for sale is liquor."

<sup>671</sup> Milk 2004 has compiled the history of Ruben Loofer Makaranga. He was the first elder of Nkurenkuru congregation, but his relationship with the missionaries was broken because of his polygamy. He worked for the colonial administration and was in an influential position in the Kavango region. In all, he can be described as an opportunist, who tried to benefit from the whites by any means. See footnote 184.

<sup>672</sup> Mr C's e-mail 19.2.2009.

dissertation about the beginning of the Catholic mission in eastern Kavango that it was predominantly material goods that attracted people to the mission.<sup>673</sup> Children came to the school because there they had the opportunity to work and earn some clothing materials.<sup>674</sup> Eckl also quoted Mbukushu *fumu* (Mbukushu title for *hompa*) Libebe's words: "Now we have hunger, namely a hunger for things."<sup>675</sup> If the people could not earn by decent means, they came to beg or even steal;<sup>676</sup> so they tried to take advantage of the mission in one way or another. When the first Catholic missionaries tried to persuade the people to come to church services, a common question was: "What will I get to eat?"<sup>677</sup> According to Eckl, at least in the beginning the biggest benefit of the mission was economical. In other ways, the influence of the missionaries was too weak to really transform the culture.<sup>678</sup>

Kari Miettinen argued differently in his dissertation. The Finnish Lutheran missionaries were not able to really support the people financially. Instead, they had a vision of a self-supporting local church and introduced annual parish fees in Owamboland as early as in 1919 (according to the Finnish model of church taxes). I suppose that not all the parish members were able to pay, but paying fees became a kind of ideal for Christians. According to Miettinen, contract labour was a far more important source of economy for the people than any work or items the missionaries could provide. Teaching became a more interesting career, except for the really devoted ones, only after the government grants were increased in the 1940s. Then the government also set its own aims for education, so it was no more purely the work of the mission.<sup>679</sup>

In any case, the informants mentioned literacy and education as important achievements of the mission.<sup>680</sup>

Without the missionaries, who came to bring Christianity, there was no education, there was no education. We couldn't be talking this language that I'm speaking with you. We couldn't be seen all this development then here. At least this is something good that they brought. They... I think, even this one is because of the missionaries, that we have a better school like this.

Though it's not directly connected to Christianity, it was something that changed the world. I mean the world of the local people. -- It have made us connecting...

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<sup>673</sup> Eckl 2004, 394.

<sup>674</sup> Eckl 2004, 348.

<sup>675</sup> Eckl 2004, 394 (citing Gotthardt 1921, 62). "*Jetzt haben wir Hunger und zwar Kaufhunger.*"

<sup>676</sup> Eckl 2004, 401.

<sup>677</sup> Eckl 2004, 395. "*Was bekomme ich da zu essen?*" from Gotthardt 1921.

<sup>678</sup> Eckl 2004, 403.

<sup>679</sup> Miettinen 2005, 251–253. Although Miettinen's doctoral thesis is about Owamboland, I believe that the results are also applicable in the neighbouring Kavango.

<sup>680</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008. The same issues were mentioned by Namibia's former president on his visit to Finland: "You brought us the Gospel, you taught us to read and write."

connected us with the rest of the world. There is education, and that's the most powerful thing that they brought.<sup>681</sup>

The missionaries have even helped to connect the people in Kavango with the rest of the world. Because of education, he would not feel out of place even in Finland, argued Mr A.<sup>682</sup> He continued comparing dugout canoes, traditional vehicles in Kavango, to modern boats that use propellers and allow the travellers to simply sit without doing anything.

You see, that could have been happening, if the Europeans never came. Our culture could have kept it. But was it taking us anywhere? -- We didn't lose our culture totally. We still know the values of our tradition. But then with this education we have so many changes, things have... a lot of things have changed.<sup>683</sup>

Education is powerful.

For *foromani* Rebekka Kambundu the biggest change was about medicine.

It was different, because every sickness is just about... [witch]craft, they used to drink tree... the roots or the leaves, because of to heal themselves... -- But with the changes, when the missionaries came now, no[w] things changed, because he could not drink any more traditional medicine to heal themselves. Even though it's been practiced, but like now it's the neighbouring countries that are coming to bring this here, because they want money. But otherwise the missionaries really helped.<sup>684</sup>

Missionaries brought proper medicine instead of traditional healing, and this was especially helpful. *Otate* Isak Veijo's opinion was the opposite: "Hospitals, for example... as we are still now talking about traditional healing, the people is not really convinced that the white healing system is better than the earlier."<sup>685</sup> This is quite a strong argument against the idea that the people would have been "bought" to Christianity by offering modern health care to them. *Otate* Isak Veijo likened this to luring people by giving them sweets; it does not lead into anything real. In a similar way, Christianity offered via only schools or hospitals does not last.<sup>686</sup>

My Namibian friends were almost unanimous that it was the message, the gospel proclaimed, that touched the people, not education or other western things.

These are two different things. There are people, who believe in Jesus Christ -- but then they were not educated. -- We find good Christians like there's an old mama, whom I always refer to. She is still coming to church, while she is older than this church here. -- She cannot read beyond, just reading the Bible and singing. -- So is not education that made people [to convert].<sup>687</sup>

The people want to get to heaven, and information about heaven is found in the Bible, which the missionaries brought to the people, wrote Mr C.<sup>688</sup> As discussed

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<sup>681</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>682</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>683</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>684</sup> Rebekka Kambundu's interview 28.7.2013, interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe.

<sup>685</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>686</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>687</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>688</sup> Mr C's e-mail 1.10.2008.



in chapter 3.3, *otate* Isak Veijo had a strong opinion: “The first missionaries they preached.”<sup>689</sup> In his opinion, the proper schools came much later. He also noted that the apartheid government actually forbade the missionaries from teaching beyond very simple things.<sup>690</sup>

Even though the informants did not believe in earthly things persuading people about the superiority of Christianity, Christianity may also promise earthly welfare. Mr C expressed it wisely:

Yes, Christianity is for both heavenly benefit and earthly welfare. I do believe that when our line between us and God is mended, then our line between men is change[d] for better.<sup>691</sup>

The Finnish mission itself has always tried to align its work as holistic, considering the whole person, the soul, mind, and body.<sup>692</sup> African religiosity also combines these views. Western people often separate everyday life from spiritual things, but Africans do not traditionally make such a distinction.

A point of view still worth mentioning is the relationships between different generations. The strategy of the mission can be taken as oriented to the younger generation, as school work comprised such a significant part of what was done. As the older generations remained “pagans” and the younger ones became Christians, it inescapably created tensions between them. The missionaries used to lament about the power of “pagan grandmothers.”<sup>693</sup> Modern learning itself can create problems in respecting the parents. Mr Hamurenge, the university lecturer, was pondering about his personal problems in this respect. He pointed out that he never looked at his parents as stupid, but he admitted there was tension due to his fiancée’s illiterate parents.<sup>694</sup> Traditionally, respecting elders was expected from all. Now these ideals are falling apart.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>690</sup> Isak Veijo’s interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>691</sup> Mr C’s e-mail 19.2.2009.

<sup>692</sup> I say this as a Finn, knowing that the mission has done a lot of practical work in the fields of education, medicine and agriculture, among others. Veikko Munyika, now a bishop of ELCIN, has an opposite view of the Finnish mission. According to his doctoral analysis, Finnish missionaries saw the relationship between God and human beings as vertical only, and the social gospel was rejected. He justified his argument by analysing some early literal material by Finnish missionaries. Munyika 2004, 335. I would argue that the Finnish mission has changed a lot throughout its history whereas the Namibian Christians have largely maintained the customs and ideas that were taught to them long ago.

<sup>693</sup> This is a missionary legend learnt in discussions with older generation missionaries. For example, Muurman 2011, 28. Conversely, Catholic Fisch 2009, 56 wrote about the problems in conversion of elderly Kavango people; they used to mix up Christian and traditional views as they were so stuck in their traditions.

<sup>694</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>695</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013. This can be compared with Nampala 2006, 91: “The integration of African and European customs resulted in collapse of social control and codes of behaviour among African families.”

Today's freedom is unfortunately eroding people's behaviour.

Like in the past there is no housewife, who will stay away at night at a drinking place leaving the family. -- But now with the rights, you cannot tell the person not to go, where they want to go. If she decides she stay away for the whole night, she will stay away for the whole night. So the modern rights have become much and then it has reduced the power of the traditional authorities. The same with the children of course. -- [The human rights are] like a sharp knife given to a person, who doesn't know where the sharp edge... they will cut themselves.<sup>696</sup>

Otate Isak Veijo even saw the human rights coming "from the devil's side."<sup>697</sup> In his opinion, the Bible clearly teaches us what is right and what is wrong. The present human rights seem to give a right for people to do whatever they want. Of course we need human rights, but the rights must have their limits – otherwise chaos follows.<sup>698</sup> I have heard similar voices elsewhere in Africa. Missionary Maritta Peltokangas summarised a lesson by *Tatekulu* Noa Ndeutapo, then an 80 year old church leader from Angola, about cultural changes.

We learned how these tribal cultures had good order and strict discipline. Everyone knew his place and everyone had to be obedient to their superiors – women to men, younger to older. Breaking the rules led to severe punishments. --

Christian culture is different in many ways: polygamy is not allowed, capital punishment has been abolished, women have their voices heard, no one is forced to be married anymore, people are not afraid of ancestral spirits, and in the case of illness or death, the culprit is no longer sought from among the family members or neighbours etc. In addition to preaching the gospel, the church has taught people to read, take care of cleanliness, and understand reasons for diseases.

As a side effect to all this good there is a change for the worse going on: As fears are no more ruling the lives of the people, discipline and order are loosening.<sup>699</sup>

The traditional culture in Kavango, or anywhere, has not been dichotomically good or bad. It has had its positive sides, but also negative sides, and the informants seemed to be quite realistic with that. Some cultural practices, such as polygamy, did not feel respectable for the informants. There used to be tribal wars and slavery.<sup>700</sup> Witchcraft was widely discussed in the previous chapter. Christianity saved people from these kinds of harmful practices. Christianity has also brought equality and democracy. The former society was

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<sup>696</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>697</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>698</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

<sup>699</sup> Peltokangas 2008, 8–9. "Meille tuli selväksi, kuinka näissä heimokulttuureissa vallitsi hyvä järjestys ja ankara kuri. Kukin tiesi oman paikkansa, ja kunkin oli toteltava ylempiään: naisten miehiä, nuorempien vanhempia. Sääntöjen rikkomisesta seurasi ankara rangaistus. -- Kristittyjen kulttuuri on monin tavoin erilaista: moniavioisuus ei ole sallittua, kuolemanrangaistus on poistettu, naiset ovat saaneet äänensä kuuluville, ketään ei enää pakoteta avioliittoon, kuolleitten henkiä ei pelätä, sairaus- ja kuolemantapauksissa syyllistä ei enää etsitä perheenjäsenten tai naapurien joukosta jne. Evankeliumin julistuksen ohessa kirkko opettanut ihmiset lukemaan, huolehtimaan puhtaudesta ja tuntemaan sairauksien syitä. -- Kaiken tämän hyvän lieveilmiönä on kuitenkin tapahtumassa muutos huonompaan: kun pelko ei enää hallitse ihmisten elämää, kuri ja järjestys ovat höltyneissä."

<sup>700</sup> Christoph Hamurenge's interview 5.7.2013; Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

very much unequal and undemocratic. The position and class of a person ruled his life.<sup>701</sup>

However, it is obvious that in the traditional way of life there have been a lot of good things, such as respecting elders or being hospitable to travellers. It was not only “dark paganism” as the old missionaries used to say. Mr Hamurenge crystallised his thoughts into the following sentences: “Culture gives you identity; Christianity gives you order and purpose. -- If you abandon your culture, it is dangerous. If you don’t understand Christianity, it will destroy culture.”<sup>702</sup> I think these are valuable words, worth remembering as guidelines.

#### **4.6. Same God?**

Christianity is a monotheistic religion, with a belief in one God. It seems obvious that the belief in one Supreme Being, God, is common to all Bantu peoples.<sup>703</sup>

God is the Creator and Supporter of everything. The church history book of Namibia starts with the fact that all various ethnic groups in the country have traditionally conceived the universe as having been created by God.<sup>704</sup>

The traditional Owambo God was a supreme spirit known as *Kalunga*. The same name can be found from several tribes in Angola and up to Zambia and Congo. On the other hand, several other names have also been used.<sup>705</sup> Among others, Nampala summarised the following properties of *Kalunga*: He “possessed important forces over fertility, rain and the growth of cultivated plants and a rich harvest. -- [He] was everywhere and saw everywhere. -- Sometimes [he] stepped down to earth in different forms and revealed himself to any persons he wanted. -- [He] helped, protected and gave rain to all equally. -- He heard and saw everything.” He also decided when it was someone’s time to die.<sup>706</sup> On the other hand, there seems to be a difference in how God was associated with the rich and powerful instead of ordinary, poor people.<sup>707</sup> I suppose that the Owambo conception of God is very much applicable in Kavango as well.

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<sup>701</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>702</sup> Christoph Hamurenge’s interview 5.7.2013.

<sup>703</sup> Mbiti 1975, 45 and Idowu 1973, 149, 161 go so far as claiming that all Africans believe in God, who is basically one.

<sup>704</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, 1.

<sup>705</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, 2–3; Munyika 2004, 156–160; Nampala 2006, 18.

<sup>706</sup> Nampala 2006, 17–18.

<sup>707</sup> Munyika 2004, 148.

Of my informants, it is noteworthy that *otate* Heikki Ausiku reminded me that the people in Kavango believed in God even before Christianity. God was called by many names: *Sankendengere*, *Nyambi* or *Karunga*. *Otate* Heikki Ausiku described God:

He was believed to be a God to control everything, who can cause everything. And then he's also... he can bring wealth to the community, rain to the community. He can even bring epidemic or death to the community. But he was also regarded as have some amount of mercy, kindness...<sup>708</sup>

Heikki Ausiku was sure that it must be the same God as in Christianity. "And there is not difference, where we can say *Karunga*, *Nyambi* or be given another name, but he is the same. -- *Nyambi* is another name for the big *Karunga*."<sup>709</sup> *Nyambi* was used to speak of God in cases of illness. There was a drumming ritual for *uvera waNyambi*, a sickness caused by God. *Sankendengere* was associated with food. Perhaps the name *Karunga*, adopted by the church, was more general, somehow above the other names. A similar name, *Kalunga*, was already deployed in the church in Owamboland.<sup>710</sup> But according to *otate* Heikki Ausiku, the other names could apply to the Christian God as well.<sup>711</sup> In the past, God was prayed to specifically mentioning the forefathers. According to Heikki Ausiku "it is the same like in -- Judaism, maybe granted the respect to the people and your God of your forefather Abraham, Jacob, Isaac."<sup>712</sup>

Mr B also told of traditional rain-making rituals that people asked God for rain. As a commoner he did not see any dissonance between the traditional prayer and Christianity. It was evident to him that the God of the Christian faith and that of their traditional religion was the same.<sup>713</sup>

On the contrary, *otate* Isak Veijo doubted whether it can be the same God. In his opinion, too many different names reveal that it cannot be just one. The people were praying for rain from one god and for wealth from another one. But not being a theologian, *otate* Isak Veijo promised to leave the problem to the researchers.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>709</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>710</sup> For the time being, I did not find any proof, but I assume that the Finnish missionaries in Owamboland borrowed the translation for God from the German missionaries working among the Herero without thinking much about its suitability.

<sup>711</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013.

<sup>712</sup> Heikki Ausiku's interview 15.7.2013. – Similarly, Buys & Nambala 2003, 2-3 consider the traditional Owambo designation of God, *Kalunga kaNangombe*, *Niita nanIiyamba* as equivalent with the Hebrew God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, they noted that the "people never offered sacrifices to him, but only to the ancestors," because God cannot be forced to anything.

<sup>713</sup> Mr B's interview 14.7.2013.

<sup>714</sup> Isak Veijo's interview 11.7.2013.

Bishop Sindano, the protector of Christian doctrine, answered just as Namibian church history<sup>715</sup> puts it:

God is the same. Because people believe that God that is in heaven. And they believe that God is there, who create everything. What we see, is creating... is created by God. -- And they say God is spirit, therefore you can't see him. And they say, God can get angry and some... send some evil spirit to the people, who pounce them more illness. Or God can be happy and protect the people.

- *And so that fits together with Christianity?*

Yes. Yeah. That's why they change... Where in Rukwangali you say *Karunga*, this *Karunga* is not changed.

- *But even then I have understood that the old missionaries didn't think like that. They took the name of Karunga, so that people would understand, what is spoken about. But they were thinking of a very different kind of God.*

Ahaa. Now the Africans think that *Karunga* is the same. Yeah. The same. Yeah. What they think different, is maybe, like I say, the ancestor as a media... because they died already, so they are becoming spirit, they can talk to us to *Karunga*.<sup>716</sup>

Even the bishop thought that it was the same heavenly God, Creator of everything, invisible, but responding to the people.

With Mr A we came to the problem of understanding what happened to those people who had died before the message about Jesus reached them. After some contemplating, because the question was obviously new, Mr A paralleled them to the people of the Old Covenant:

I take it like in the Old Testament. There was no Jesus that you need to go through. But they just pray, there is just Almighty there. So you can take them in that category.<sup>717</sup>

This sounded a very feasible interpretation. I urged him to continue thinking whether Christianity could be understood as an extension for the local pre-Christian religion.

The only different with Christianity is that you believe in Christ as your path to reach that God that they believe already.

- *So you think that it was the same God?*

I think that... he was the only one. It's only that they could not explain or they cannot go into details like telling us the commandments and all those things, they didn't have these details. But of course they looked around, they knew all these things to happen, of all these things to exist. There must be somebody more powerful there.

- *But even the commands, I think that they have somehow been part of the culture: that you must not steal or you should not kill other people and...*

Obviously, obviously those ones! Yes, they have been there somehow!<sup>718</sup>

Perhaps I assisted Mr A with my comments, but his reasoning seemed to come to the conclusion that the earlier tradition already included the basic contents of the

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<sup>715</sup> Buys & Nambala 2003, 1–4.

<sup>716</sup> Johannes Sindano's interview 26.7.2013.

<sup>717</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>718</sup> Mr A's interview 13.7.2013.

Christian faith. The only thing missing was Christ. That is, of course, an essential defect, but at least there is no need to see the African traditional religion as a complete opposite to Christianity. They are rather on the same continuum. However, Mr A could not consider the traditional African and the Christian religions as the same: “No, the values of Christianity are different.”<sup>719</sup> As an example of a tradition that he considered an evil practice, Mr A mentioned the killing of albinos.<sup>720</sup>

Despite the differences, it seems obvious that most people in Kavango think the God of the traditional religion and that of Christianity are equal. Veikko Munyika in his dissertation is more cautious:

I do not suggest that the concept of *Kalunga* is identical with the concept of the God preached by the missionaries. That is perhaps made impossible by the fact that the existence of the God of the missionaries is defined by his fatherhood of Jesus Christ, the latter who was unknown in Owambo religion.<sup>721</sup>

But he continued that “there seems to be no quarrel between Luther and Ovambo in terms of a hidden God.”<sup>722</sup> The hidden God refers to a mysterious power above everything, invisible and not fully understood, but functioning in the world.<sup>723</sup>

This master’s thesis is not a systematic study about God so I cannot go into much depth with the topic. However, it is clear that there is a lot in common between the traditional and Christian beliefs. Although it is commonly stated that the missionaries saw everything African as “pagan” and thus opposite to Christianity, this did not prevent them from adopting the traditional name of God, *Karunga*.<sup>724</sup> It is highly probable that the people identified what missionaries said of God with the concept they already knew, and this in turn helped them to accept the new faith.

In a corresponding way, there has been a lot of discussion about the sameness and difference between religions in general, and different people naturally come to different conclusions. However, it can be stated that completely new ideas seldom take root. Changing fundamental views in life is usually a long process, and requires that there is something familiar in the new ideology that the

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<sup>719</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>720</sup> Mr A’s interview 13.7.2013.

<sup>721</sup> Munyika 2004, 158.

<sup>722</sup> Munyika 2004, 158.

<sup>723</sup> Munyika 2004, 74–75, 158. – Luther also wrote about the revealed God, who can be known through Jesus Christ.

<sup>724</sup> However, Miettinen 2005, 128 noted, referring to Kaplan, that a translation cannot be taken as “evidence of missionaries’ tolerance of African culture.”

person is able to deal with.<sup>725</sup> Lewis R. Rambo calls this “intellectual availability,” which he describes as “some significant continuity or connection with that person’s previous orientation.”<sup>726</sup>

Although there are differences between the religions, there is a significant similarity between the world of the Bible and the traditional African life. Bishop Sindano noted:

“You see, they all... the Old Testament, this five book of Moses, especial all, what saying Leviticus, Number and Deuteronomy, is 100 % the tradition now of African people.”<sup>727</sup>

Perhaps that is the deepest reason why Christianity is finally embraced by the Africans. They experienced something that was already familiar to them, and it was even written in a Book. In fact, the similarity lay in the message of the missionaries, not in external customs.

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<sup>725</sup> In Adrian Hastings’ voluminous work *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* his basic thesis was that Christian faith was accepted in Africa, because it embodied so many ideas already familiar to the population. The first example was Congolese Catholicism at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the Middle Ages in Europe as well as in Africa all kinds of disastrous events were explained by spiritual forces. Miracles could be expected, saints (or ancestors) were prayed for, a sacred object (whether it be a cross or a ju-ju figure) embodied protective power and the king was owed a sacral legitimacy. Hastings 1994, 73–77, 79–80. The similarities may have been different at different times, but people tend to be conservative in what kind of ideas they accept.

<sup>726</sup> Rambo 1993, 61.

<sup>727</sup> Johannes Sindano’s interview 26.7.2013.

## 5. Conclusions

This study is a product of a long process of becoming acquainted with traditions of the Kavango region in Namibia. Besides personal experiences of living there in the 1990s, I was familiar with stories and writings of Finnish missionaries, who had worked in the area – mostly in what is now known as the Kavango West region. I have been very interested to hear and read depictions of traditional life, but I have long suspected that my point of view is one-sided. I have wanted to broaden my scope to views of indigenous people, to find out how they see the new religion brought to them, and what they think of their old traditions, many of which are bygone history. This study aims to address these topics and give a voice to local people.

In terms of historical research it is a problem that sources written by indigenous people in Kavango are very few. I proceeded, then, to make interviews (in 2013), although that has its limitations. Human memory fails and fades, and thoughts about one's own experiences change with time and new experiences. The perspective of the interviews, then, is the thoughts that indigenous Christians now have of their faith, and how they now evaluate their traditional culture.

Christianity is now the predominant religion in most of Namibia, and Kavango makes no exception. I was surprised that even my eldest informants had been Christians since childhood, so that their parents had also been Christians. Christianity, then, has longer roots in the area than I anticipated, partly because of missionary activity long ago in Angola. It was a false assumption that the older the informants, the more they could tell about the time when Christianity was just arriving. None of my elderly informants told a story of “heathen” practices or beliefs oppressing them, or how Christianity would have given new meaning to life.

My lack of language skills is an obvious limitation. Without an interpreter I am unable to engage in any deeper conversation with “ordinary” people who do not speak English. Even with interpreters there are limitations, not only with practical arrangements and schedules, but even more because interpreters often only tell the basic idea of what is said by the informant instead of translating every word.

Among thirteen informants there were two persons who had actually converted to Christianity – and they were by no means the eldest informants! One was a woman from Angola who had been baptised only recently, within a year of



the interview. Unfortunately she was not very talkative and did not want to tell about her past, possibly because of traumatic experiences. Her family had been dispersed by war, and there may have been fear of witchcraft in her traditional beliefs. She simply made it known that she wanted to be a Christian. The other convert, quite surprisingly, was a man I met in my home. Nikolaus Katombera from Kavango was in Finland as an exchange student. He told me that he came to baptism as a teenager because his friends had Christian names and he wanted one, too. Later in a church school he came to a deeper understanding of Christian faith. Schools operated by churches, then, have an influence on the lives and convictions of young people. Before Nikolaus became a Christian, however, traditional religion was not very obvious in his home. Life was centred on making a living, but in cases of illness the family called for a traditional healer.

Christianity had personal significance to all of the informants. In a Finnish context some of the younger informants might have been critical of religion or disinterested, but I did not come across such persons in Kavango. Everyone insisted on the personal importance of Christianity, and almost all of the informants spoke spontaneously of the importance of prayer, although they were not specifically asked about it. Christians in Kavango see prayer first and foremost as communication with God. The comments of the informants also convey confidence that God does hear even if there is no immediate response. Bishop emeritus Johannes Sindano emphasised that prayer must not be selfish; his example of an answer to prayer was no small matter, peace in Angola after three decades of civil war.

Prayers and sacrifices to ancestors have been at the heart of traditional religion. To ensure success, sacrifices were made to ancestors whenever something new was started. Harvest was also an occasion when sacrifices and thanksgiving were made. On one hand, ancestral spirits were feared, but on the other they were trusted for help in seeking good fortune. It can be presumed that prayer and sacrifice have been so commonplace in traditional religion that they have provided a model for Christians in approaching God. Sacrifices are no longer necessary, but prayer is a part of everyday life in Kavango. In old beliefs ancestors were necessary as intermediaries to approach God, but this does not mean God was a faraway spirit beyond comprehension – God has always been included in the faith of people in Kavango.

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood in Kavango, and drought is the most severe threat. Rain-making rituals, then, have been important. In these rites people seek the help of royal ancestors by sacrificing a black ox, a symbol of a thundercloud. In the rain-making ritual the ox is eaten whole with skin and sinews without any salt. I had thought the ritual was distant history, but was surprised to learn that it had been performed in the year I made the interviews. My informants spoke of it as “only culture” without religious implications, but if asked what they mean by culture, they refer to traditional religion.

Missionaries looked upon “paganism” (their word for traditional beliefs and practices) as evil, an opposite of Christianity. Indigenous people, however, see their old ways as something like the Old Testament: people already knew God, but Christ had not yet come. Even bishop Sindano equated the God of traditional religion with that of Christianity. Another informant, Isak Veijo, was more doubtful: in the past people in Kavango had many names for a deity, different names for different situations, so that perhaps it cannot be said that they had one God who is the same that Christians worship. Although the informants have accepted the missionaries’ teaching of Jesus as the way to heaven, there is room in their thinking for the possibility of salvation before the arrival of Christianity. The old faith was functional in its time – now the people have become Christians.

Already at the start of this study I suspected that people had received Christianity because many of its features seemed familiar. Whereas missionaries thought they were bringing something new and different, the people in Kavango see Christianity more as an addition to what was already known, albeit brought to them by the power of God. Earlier there was only oral tradition, then the missionaries brought along a holy book that tells about God. The assumption that people in Kavango place traditional beliefs on the same continuum with Christianity was strengthened as interviews were made. The world of the Old Testament was quite similar to traditional African ways of life – or, according to the interviewed bishop, completely the same. Christianity, then, introduced Jesus.

Ideas of Jesus among ordinary Christians, however, seem somewhat vague. When I asked about Jesus, one informant began to talk about God, and another about the Holy Spirit. There is still need, then, for Christian education. Mostly, however, it seems to be clear that with Jesus one can get to heaven. Heaven is clearly among the basic terminology of Christianity in Kavango. Likewise, the reality of the spirit world is a part of life. Traditionally people have believed in

many kinds of spirits, and Christianity has only brought new concepts. Perhaps ancestral spirits have been replaced by angels (or, among Catholics, by saints).

The most obvious time of transition from traditional to Christian faith was in the 1950s and 1960s when people were baptised in numbers. Traditional dress was abandoned at the same time. When missionaries had first arrived, most indigenous people still wore traditional clothing. Traditional dress, still commonplace in photographs taken in the 1950s, was considered nakedness by missionaries, and elderly ladies among the informants were so acculturated to dresses made of cloth that it may have been embarrassing for them to speak of traditional dress. Male informants, however, considered traditional dress as normal, so there is no reason to be ashamed of it – on the contrary it is respect of one's elders not to criticise their customs! Besides, traditional dress was not nakedness: genitals were hidden, *rukura* rubbed on one's skin gave protection and colour, and ornaments and beads showed one's social status.

Missionaries thought that magic was involved in traditional beautification. The informants were aware of the function of amulets, but otherwise they insisted that traditional ornaments and hairdos were used specifically for beauty. Missionaries opposed them strictly; they did not allow baptism to women with traditional outfits and hairdos. An elderly lady among the informants, Rebekka Kambundu, insisted that missionaries did well to require change in this matter – but she based her opinion completely on cleanliness and hygiene, not that there would have been any magic to abandon. Incidentally, there are also rules on hairdos in modern Namibia: well-reputed boarding schools such as the ELCIN Nkurenkuru High School forbid girls from braiding their hair. It is said that this helps to concentrate in studies. Is there some echo of rules set by missionaries?

Among men, polygamy was an obstacle to entry into the Christian church. A Christian man is only allowed one wife. Polygamy appeared much more common than I had expected. Some of my informants had experience of polygamous family life; the fathers of at least two of them had each had two wives. Some informants also knew of present-day families of a husband with more than two wives in Kavango. The Lutheran church continues to strictly oppose polygamy, and young people have by and large embraced western ideas of monogamy.

Traditional healers are found in Namibia even today. In Kavango, however, my informants said they usually come from other countries. Several informants

had personal experience of traditional healing: some said they had really been helped, whereas others had negative experiences. According to the informants there used to be more healers in the area, and in the past they were also better. There were conflicting attitudes toward traditional healing in general; some informants were ambivalent on this. Some thought traditional healing is good, because people need help, and healers have real cures, whereas others said people should not go to healers because many of them are quacks that cheat people of their money, and also because of the religious dimensions of healing. Instead, Namibians should make use of herbal medicine by means of medical science and pharmacy – all informants admitted many healers have real knowledge of herbal cures. In some cases science has confirmed this. Also in Finland people have sought help from “folk healers,” and many say they have gotten help.

The biggest problem with healing is witchcraft – not that the healer is a “witch,” but that the healing does not always end with finding a treatment for the patient. Too often the healer goes on to look for the cause of the illness or injury, and the typical explanation is witchcraft. Some person who may be unaware of the case can be labelled as a witch. The problem, then, is that innocent persons can become victims of a witch hunt. Such false accusations are made even nowadays, as belief in witchcraft is not just history. It is this dark side of healing that is in conflict with Christian faith. Besides revelations made by a healer, accusations of witchcraft are also bred by jealousy, for example of another person’s success.

In the interviews, then, my informants brought up two major differences between traditional religion and Christianity. One is knowing Jesus, a result of the spread of Christianity, and the other is the traditional belief in witchcraft. Otherwise most of the informants thought that Christianity and traditional beliefs do not contradict each other very much. Christianity has brought better knowledge of God than people used to have, but in Kavango there has always been belief in God. Some differences were found in values, such as the way in which albinos are treated. Albino babies used to be left at the river to die, but this has been changed by Christianity; now they have full worth as humans.

Good things have come as the church has taught equality and loving one’s neighbour, but one can also get an impression that Christianity and the church in Kavango are rather moralistic. A lot of emphasis is put on the biblical command against adultery (the sixth commandment in the numbering used by Lutherans and Roman Catholics). Persons who cohabit are labelled as sinners, so that they

cannot fully participate in the life of the church. This strains many young people. A major reason for lengthy cohabitation is the expense of getting married; a wedding feast is a major show. It is not enough to pay for food and drink and the venue, but money is spent even on the lodging and transportation of guests. There is clearly a need for simpler and less expensive weddings in Namibia.

Prevalent wedding customs have evidently been imported from Europe. Although there was marriage in traditional culture, actual weddings were not celebrated. On some night the groom simply came to the hut of his bride, and so they became a married couple. Agreement on the marriage, however, had been reached much earlier, in some cases even before the spouse was born! According to old tradition, the mother of a future spouse could apply ointment on the belly of a pregnant woman, indicating that the child to be born would eventually marry a child of the one rubbing the ointment. Deals between families were not always done so early, but traditionally parents decided on the marriage of their daughter. A maternal uncle would serve as a matchmaker for a prospective groom. Originally there was no price to be paid for a bride. Among the Mbunza people (and possibly elsewhere) it used to be customary that a small ox figure moulded of clay was presented as a gift, but evidently later people started to pay for a bride with live oxen. With time, marriage has become more and more costly with extravagant weddings.

Evidently missionaries are in part to blame for the moralism of present-day Christianity, because they required certain kinds of behaviour of their parishioners. For example, a Christian man who took more wives was excommunicated with the tolling of death bells in order to teach how Christians should live. Moralism, however, is not only a product of Christian mission, as traditional culture also had strict discipline. Young people were expected to respect their elders, girls were expected not to get pregnant before marriage, and men could be punished for causing such pregnancies. Surely, girls were married off at an early age, but the present phenomenon of premarital teenage pregnancies seems to be a product of recent decades. According to the informants, rules were followed in traditional culture because if they were broken, punishment was severe.

Discipline has become lax also in the use of alcohol. This has more to do with influences other than Christian mission, but one of the informants, an educated man, actually saw a connection between the use of sugar used for

fermentation and the arrival of missionaries, so that missionaries would have caused home brewing of alcoholic drinks. It is unlikely that missionaries would have made sugar more available, and in any case they have deplored heavy drinking and tried to promote the temperance movement. In the colonial era, South African authorities tried prohibition at first but then reversed its policy, so that “Cuca shops” have sprung up everywhere. On the whole, the informants agreed that widespread drinking problems are a recent phenomenon unseen in traditional culture. People did get drunk occasionally, but the next morning they were back to work.

During the course of this study I began to conclude that the impact of Christian mission on the life of people in Kavango has not been as great or dramatic as I had thought. To be sure, missionaries did require female converts to give up their traditional hairdo, and men were expected to be faithful to one wife. Missionaries have had an impact as teachers and in medical care. However, there have been other cultural influences as well, increasingly as years have gone by. A colonial government station already existed in Nkurenkuru when the first Finnish missionaries came there. In 1936 the outpost was moved to Rundu, which became the major town in the area.

I assume that the channel through which foreign influence has most effectively come to Kavango is migrant labour. For a while it was a kind of initiation rite for young men to enter the adult world. Salaries earned in migrant labour were used to buy clothes and devices such as sewing machines, bicycles, metal ploughs and radios. Migrant labourers also endured hardships of apartheid, dismal working conditions and the trampling of human rights. Even if it is concluded that missionary activity has destroyed traditional Owambo culture, the times had changed by the time the mission reached Kavango. Influences were flowing in from many directions. Perhaps missionaries would rather have wanted to turn the clock back so that “worldly” things would not come with all the new developments.

One of the elderly informants, Isak Veijo, who has seen many changes during his life, commented, “Aircraft would still be overflying even [if] we were having skins on us!” Technology is changing and people are learning many new things. People in Kavango hardly have the option of wearing the skins of the past – it is better to stay on the move.

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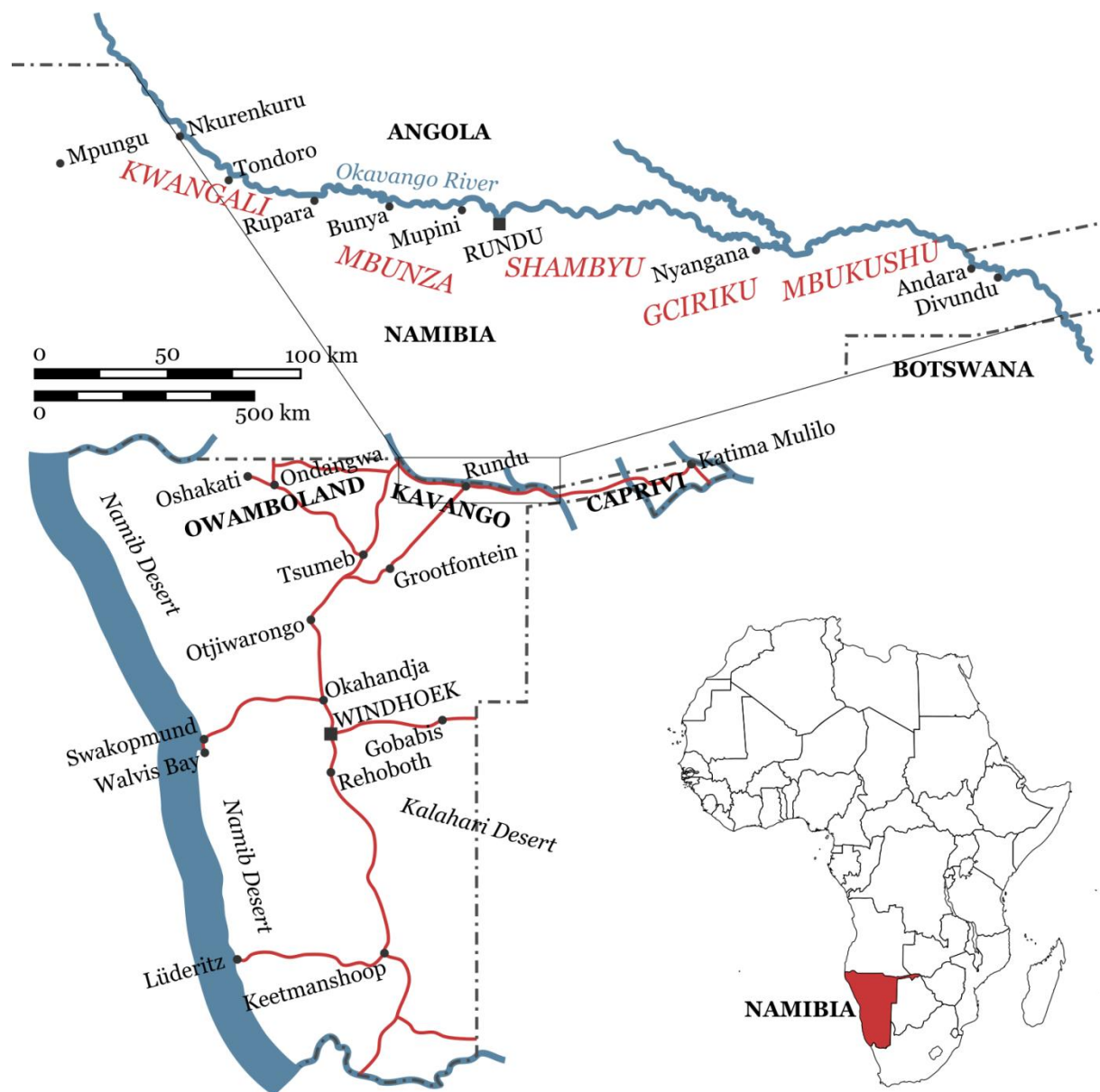


## Appendix 1. Table of the Informants

Name / Pseudonym	Place and time	Other information about the interview	Ethnic background	Sex and age group	Profession or status	Special contribution to the study
Christoph Hamurenge	Windhoek, his office at the university 5.7.2013	the first one of the interviews, recording failed, only hand-written notes	Rumanyu speaker	male, about 35	university lecturer on communications; my former student	guided me among other things at the university library; knew the traditions of his people well and explained them frankly; good analysis about the present religious situation
Isak Veijo	Nkurenkuru, in <i>otate</i> Isak's office 11.7.2013		Kwangali (family roots in Owamboland)	male, about 70	leader for Kavango Christian education project; professional background: engineer; a devoted lay Christian; volunteer church musician	long interview meandering between different topics: new African churches, traditional healing, prayer, contextualising Christianity, divorce, alcohol, drumming, rain-making ritual, influence of mission
Angolan woman	Nkurenkuru, at the market place 12.7.2013	interpreted by <i>otate</i> Isak Veijo	moved from Angola	female, about 40	recently baptised Christian	only slight due to the lack of common language; an example of a person recently converted to Christianity
Mr A	Nkurenkuru, at his home 13.7.2013		Kwangali	male, about 35	high school teacher; my former student	young well educated Kavango person; problems with the church due to cohabiting unmarried; information about witchcraft; thoughts about different types of Christianity
Mr B	Nkurenkuru, in open air next to his working place 14.7.2013		Kwangali	male, about 40	low income worker	has studied at Nkurenkuru Bible school; represents people with little money; criticism of financial matters; knows Kwangali traditions

Heikki Ausiku	Nkurenkuru, at his home 15.7.2013		Kwangali	male, about 70	traditional authority of the Kwangali; has written local church history booklet; Master of theology; has worked as a diplomat and the first mayor of Nkurenkuru town	recollections over a long period of time; knowledge of Kwangali traditions; ethical analysis on cultural traditions
Confirmation candidate	Rundu, on the construction site of a new (ELCIN) church 25.7.2013		Kwangali	female, about 20	confirmation school student; college student as well	information about confirmation school; youth perspective
Johannes Sindano	Rundu, at his home 26.7.2013		Luchazi	male, about 70	bishop emeritus	personal history of the bishop; experiences of the apartheid era; the official teaching of the church
Rebekka Kambundu	Rundu, in her yard 27.7.2013 & 28.7.2013	interpreted by Stanislaus Semethe	Shambyu	female, about 80	headman ( <i>foromani</i> ); authority due to her royal background	recollections over a long period of time; knows traditions
Stanislaus Semethe	Rundu, in the garden of a lodge 27.7.2013		Kwangali	male, about 35	principal of a senior primary school; my former student	perspective of a Catholic person; pressures for getting married
Great-grandmother	Rundu, in her yard 29.7.2013	interpreted by her grandchild, who was a female teacher	Luchazi	female, about 80	great-grandmother of my friend in Kavango	even such an old person has grown up in a Christian family; the development of Rundu town
Nikolaus Katombera	Helsinki, at my home 8.3.2015		Ngangela	male, about 30	teacher; was an exchange student at the University of Oulu	experiences of an albino; the person I searched for, a convert to Christianity, and he was young!
Mr C	Rundu 1.10.2008 & 19.2.2009 & 28.5.2010	by e-mail – the only one to answer my request by e-mail	Kwangali	male, about 35	high school teacher; my former student	belongs to a new African Pentecostal type of church (Deeper Life Bible Church)

## Appendix 2. Maps



Drawing: Heikki Salko 2017.